City Series Volume2

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エアリアルシンデイ

著●川上 稔

電撃文庫

都市シリーズ

エアリアルシティ

著●川上稔

架空都市ー倫敦

●AERIAL CITY LONDON●

電撃文庫

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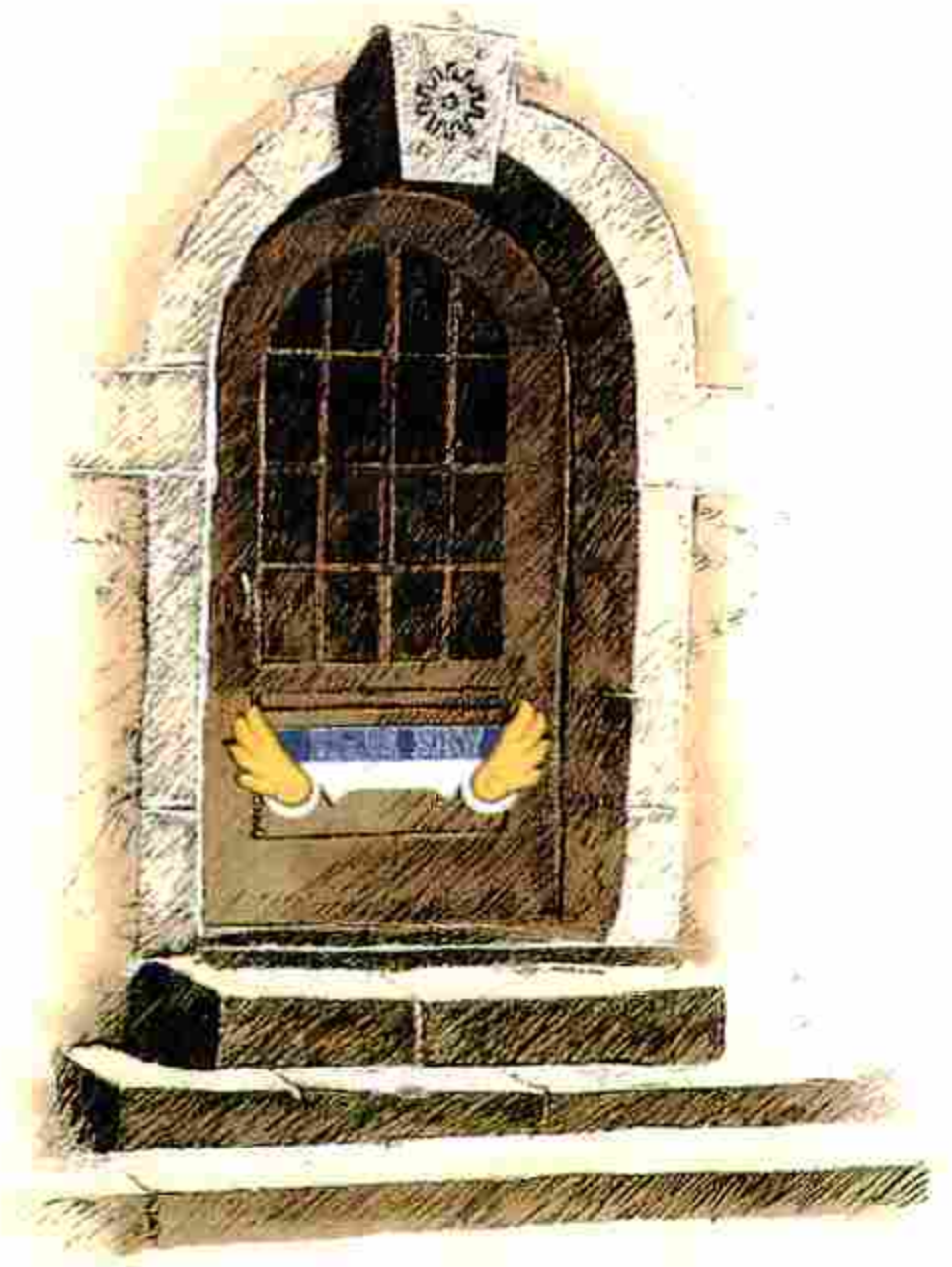


エアリアルシティ

魔物と天使が平和に暮らす都市――ロンドン。そのロンドンに３人の人間――ヴァレス、ラルフ、モイラが侵入してきた瞬間から事件は始まった。

声を抜かれて次々と殺されていく魔物たち。そして仲間たちを救うため魔族の青年・アモン、盲目の少女・クラウゼル、猫娘・フィル、そして正体不明の男・警部が立ち上がる！

人間と魔物との壮絶な闘いの中、遂に明らかになる３人の人間の真の目的!!果たして人間の陰謀を、魔物は食い止めることが出来るのか？

大戦前のロンドンを舞台に、川上　稔が贈る都市シリーズ第２弾。ついに登場!!

かわかみ みのる
川上 稔

1975年1月3日生まれの東京出身。異世界のベルリンを舞台にした『パンツァーポリス1935』で第3回電撃ゲーム小説大賞<金賞>を受賞。華々しくデビューするも、相変わらず「先生」と呼ばれるのが大の苦手。「まぁ何とか慣れてください」とは無責任な担当談。

【電撃文庫作品】

パンツァーポリス1935

エアリアルシティ

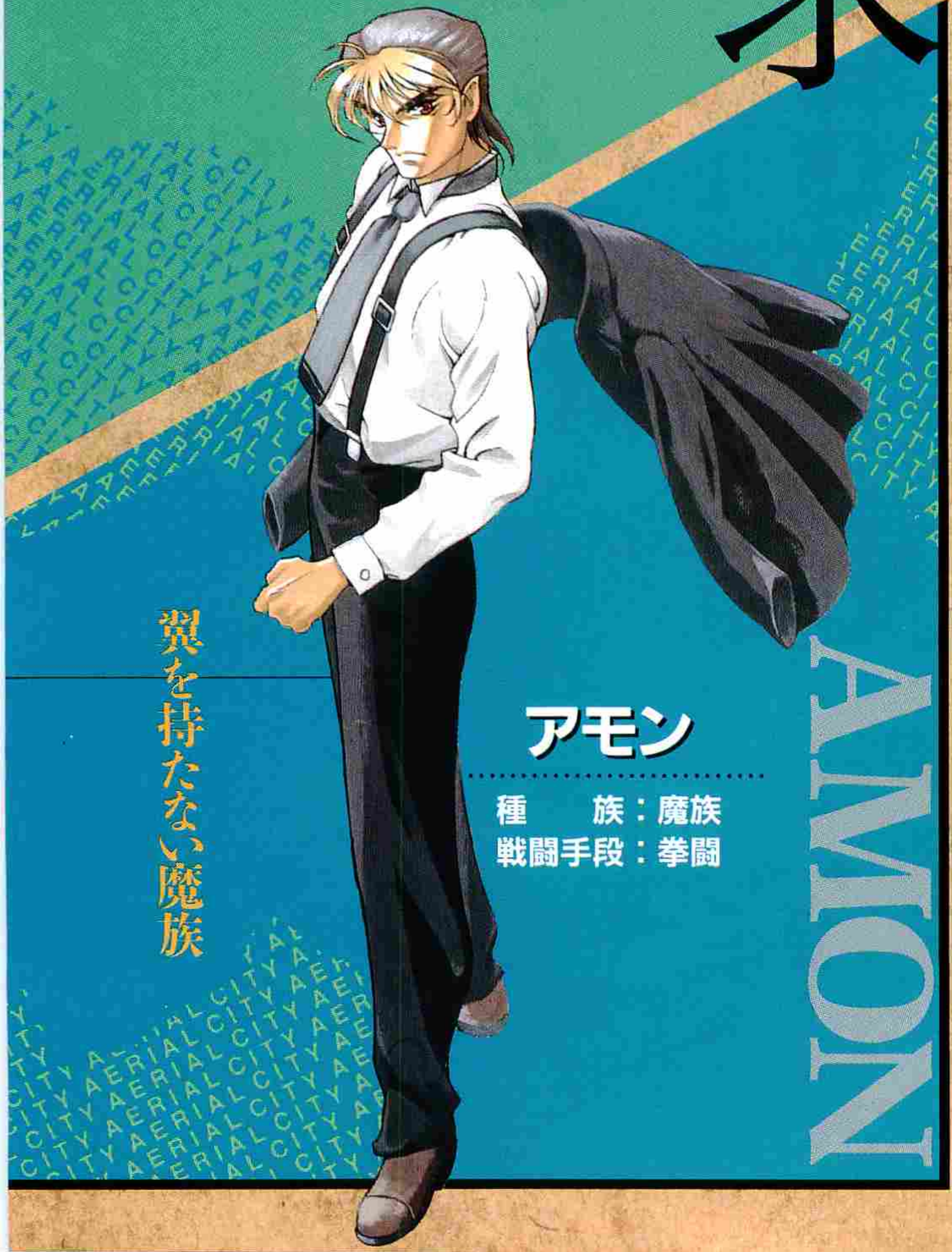
イラスト：中北晃二（なかきたこうじ）

変な生き物をこよなく愛すマルチクリエイター。とりわけ虫の姿形には愛情にも近い思いを抱いている。三重県の自宅には図書館なみの資料群を所蔵しており、圧倒的な博識を誇る。

カバー／旭印刷

求

●「この倫敦に天界を落とせばいいのだ」



翼を持たない魔族

アモン

種　　族：魔族
戦闘手段：拳闘

AMON

Death

すべてを失った男

ヴァレス

種　　族：人間
戦闘手段：剣および
　　悪魔契約術

「また、俺の周りで……か？」

死

Klaus

瞳を見せない少女

クラウゼル

種　　族：人間…？
戦闘手段：特になし

●「私はヴァレス様の援護に回ります」

身

南犬

「それ、アモンさんの悪い癖ですわ」

愛が停止した女

モイラ

種　　族：人間
戦闘手段：詠唱式魔術

AMON

思心捜査官

倫敦一キザな男

「うむ、まさに天上の男」

「何やってんだいバカ」

もと街路孤児の女性警察官

アーバンヒーロー

種　　族：不明
戦闘手段：不明

Ralf

神に背いた神父

「私は化け物と同じくらい、
天使と神が大嫌いでしてな」

ラルフ

種　　族：人間
戦闘手段：銃

種　族：猫人間
戦闘手段：獣詞変（オルタード）

フィリアス

AERIAL

エアリアルシティ

CITY

Title Page

AERIAL

City

LONDON

AERIAL CITY

Kawakami Minoru

Aerial City

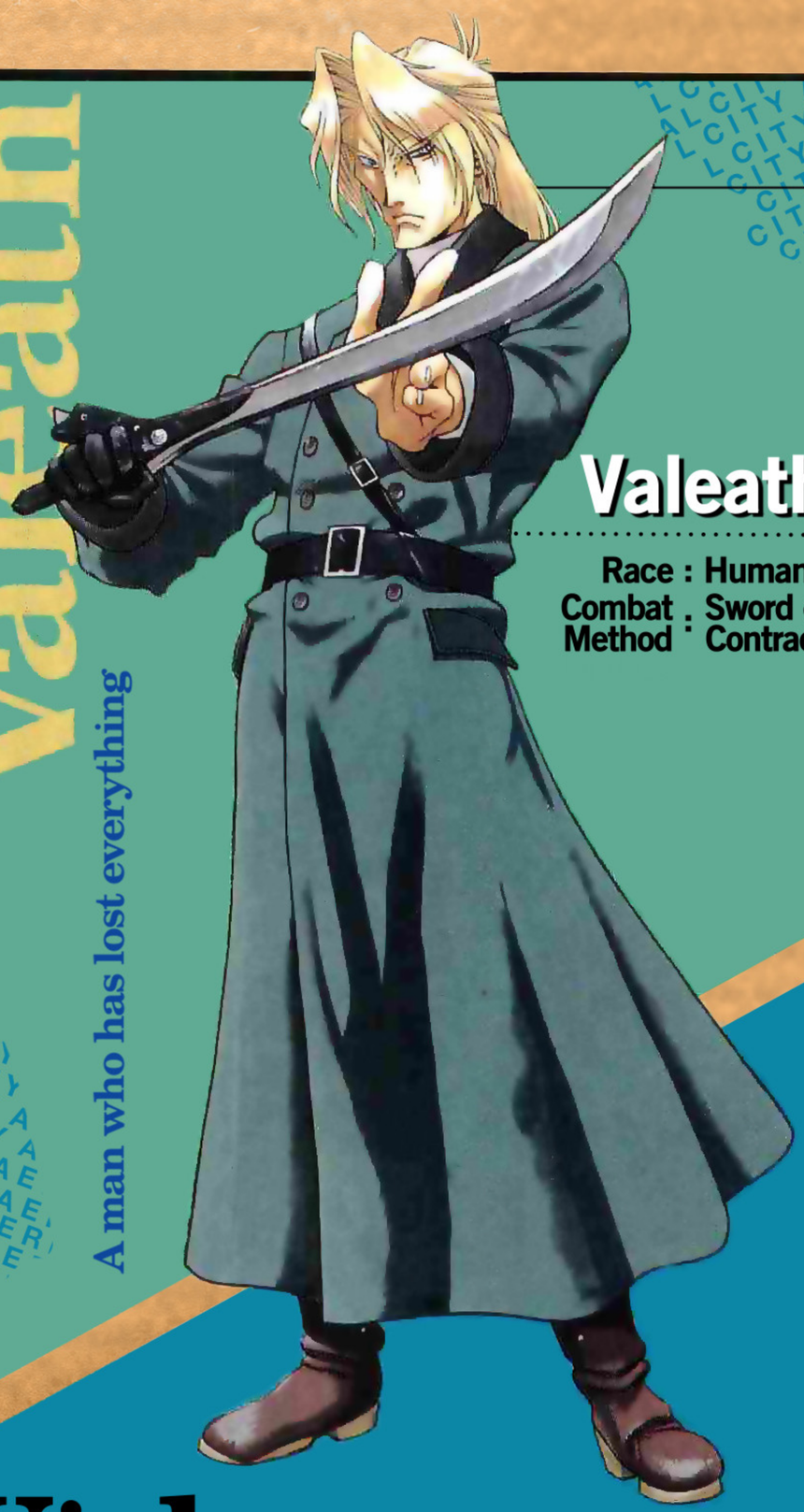
London

Kawakami Minoru

Characters 1

Death

"We simply need to drop heaven down on London."



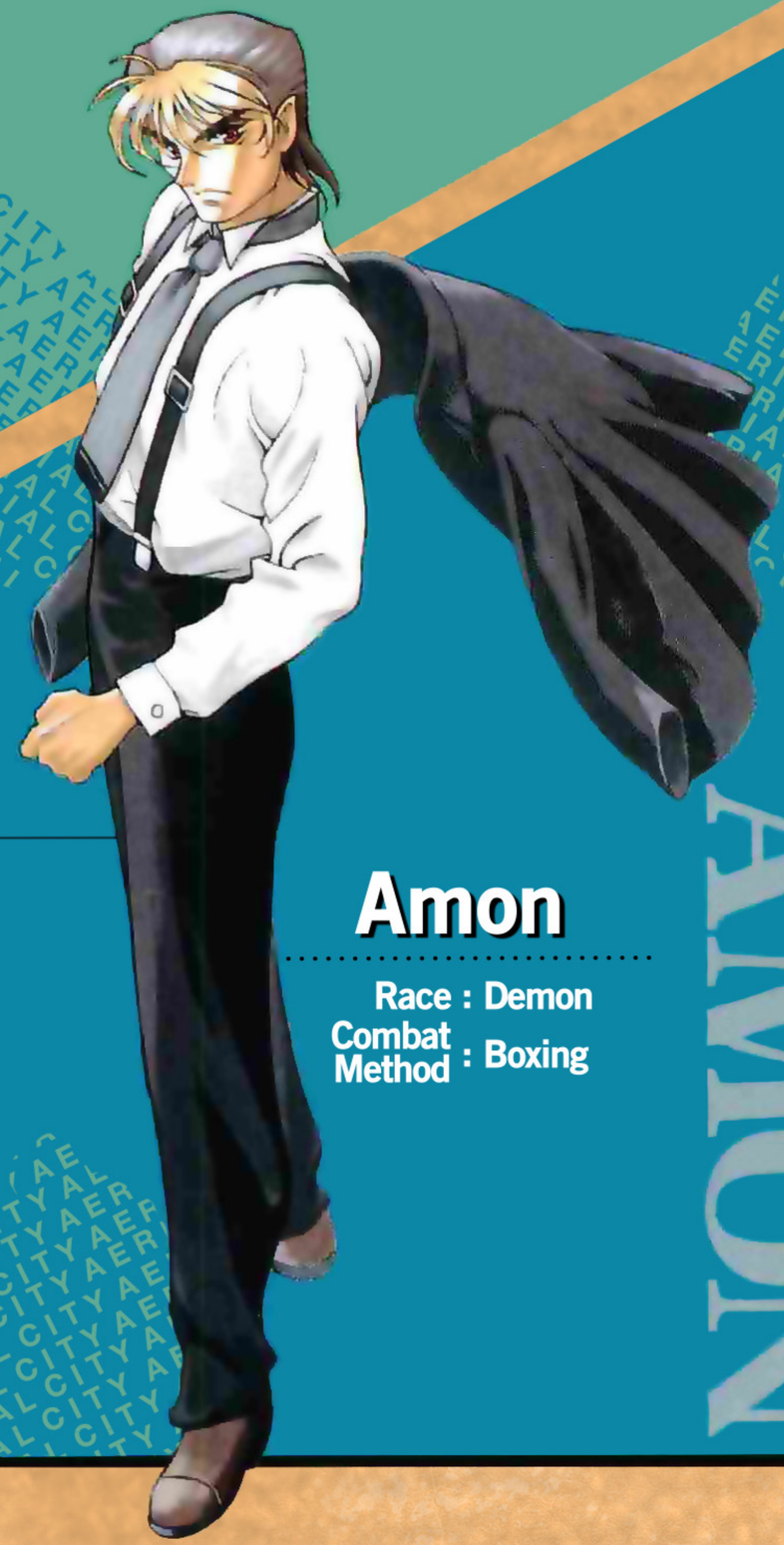
Valeath

Race : Human
Combat Method : Sword or Demon Contract Spells

A man who has lost everything

Valeath

Wish



Amon

Race : Demon
Combat Method : Boxing

A demon without wings

"It's...happening around me again?"

AMON

Corners text: Death Wish

Amon

Race: Demon

Combat Method: Boxing

A demon without wings

"It's…happening around me again?"

Valeath

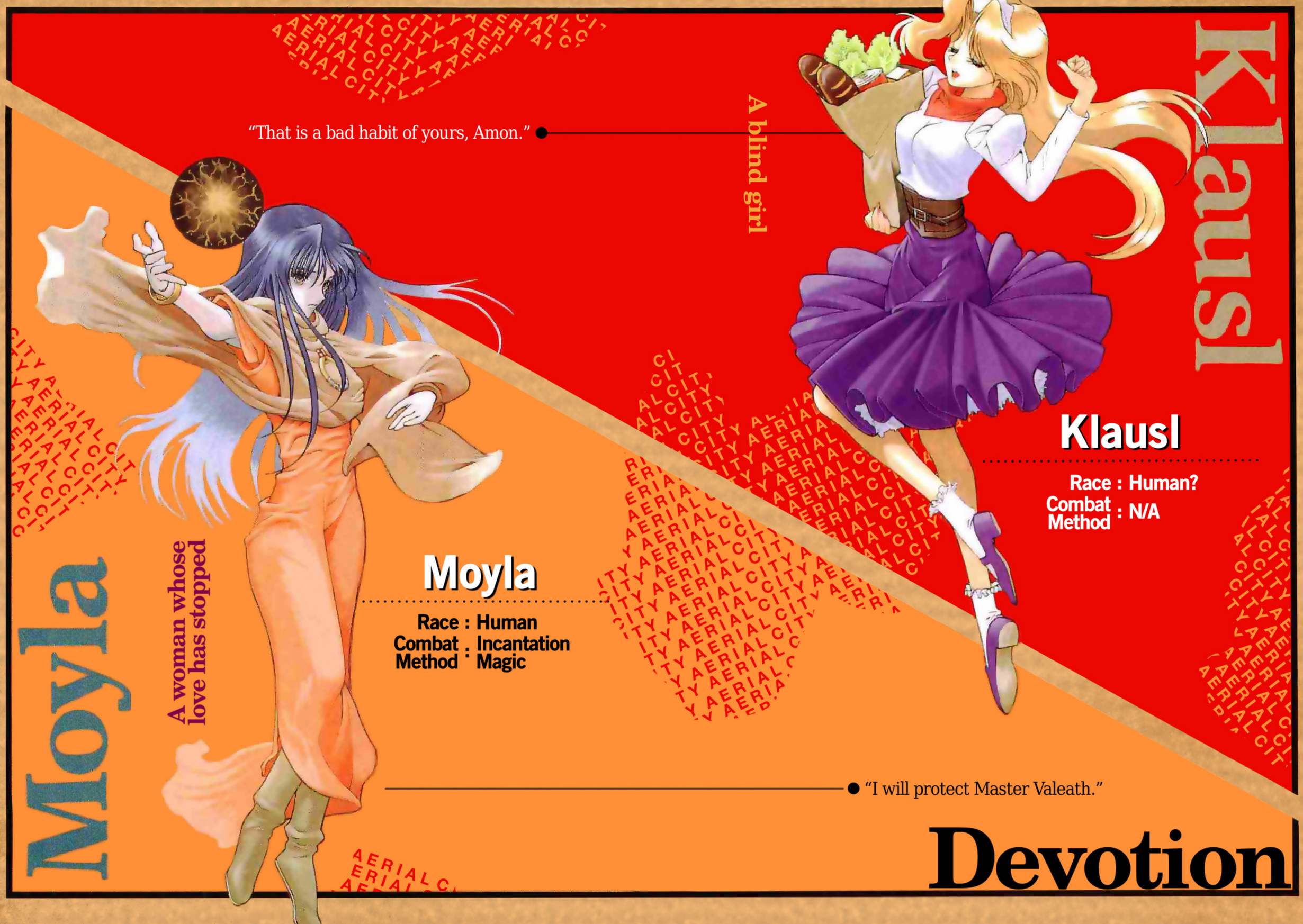
Race: Human

Combat Method: Sword or Demon Contract Spells

A man who has lost everything

"We simply need to drop heaven down on London."

Characters 2


Klaus
A blind girl
Klausl
Race : Human?
Combat Method : N/A
"That is a bad habit of yours, Amon."
Moyla
A woman whose love has stopped
Moyla
Race : Human
Combat Method : Incantation Magic
"I will protect Master Valeath."
Devotion

Corners text: Devotion

Klausl

Race: Human?

Combat Method: N/A

A blind girl

"That is a bad habit of yours, Amon."

Moyla

Race: Human

Combat Method: Incantation Magic

A woman whose love has stopped

"I will protect Master Valeath."

Characters 3

Feelings

Lalf

A priest who turned his back on god

"I hate angels and god just as much as monsters."

Ralf

Race : Human
Combat Method : Gun

Firius

Race : Werecat
Combat Method : Altered

Inspector

London's most pretentious man

"Yes, truly a man of the heavens."

"What are you doing, idiot?"

Inspector

Race : Unknown
Combat Method : Unknown

Corners Text: Feelings

Inspector

Race: Unknown

Combat Method: Unknown

London's most pretentious man

"Yes, truly a man of the heavens."

Firius

Race: Werecat

Combat Method: Altered

Former Urban Hero and current female police officer

"What are you doing, idiot?"

Ralf

Race: Human

Combat Method: Gun

A priest who turned his back on god

"I hate angels and god just as much as monsters."

Excerpt

The name of that world of fiction and the title of that book is "Aerial City – London."

(From "The Lost World")

From the moment you set foot in that foreign land, your own form and emotions are expressed in writing. Humans rarely have a chance to enter that space.

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Humans rarely have a chance to enter that space.

The name of that world of fiction and the title of that book is " Aerial City – London."

(From "The Lost World")

Opening Words

England is sealed inside the world of writing known as a book.

As people began moving from Europe to the New World in the latter half of the fifteenth century, the non-humans took over England. In order to create a protected land for them, the gods and demons that led them cut England away from reality and sealed it inside the book they had made.

The monsters, gods, demons, and heroes that had existed in reality until that point moved to that imaginary England and lived on as fictional beings…that is, as beings that only exist in the form of writing and words.

As a book, England has a cover known as heaven and a back cover known as hell. Between those are nine chapter title pages, the same number as there are orders of angels.

From the moment you set foot in that foreign land, your own form and emotions are expressed in writing.

Humans rarely have a chance to enter that space.

The name of that world of fiction and the title of that book is "Aerial[1] City – London."

(From "The Lost World")

Prologue: Strange Beginning

Part 1

Let us say there was darkness in that place.

It was a damp darkness.

Plenty of water flowed silently below it. A wide river steadily continued on to the sea while supporting the darkness.

That flowing river was the Thames.

A steam whistle sounded somewhere in the distance. The sound came from a ship travelling down the Thames, raced through the fog covering the river, and reached the city.

The city that heard the whistle was London.

The very first to hear it were the people in the port.

Precisely two figures sat in front of the warehouses lining a small wharf in the Port of London. They leaned against a large wooden box and passed a bottle of alcohol back and forth.

“I knew there’d be some left unsold. And I hear the Prohibition in the States is about to come to an end.”

Those words were spoken by a well-built elderly man. The right arm holding the bottle was a giant steam-powered false arm made of metal. The emblems engraved in the false arm suggested he belonged to the Hard Wolf race.

He passed the bottle to the man sitting next to him.

The middle-aged man in a suit took it and fidgeted as if the white wings between his back and the wooden box were in the way.

"Amon's probation period is ending soon too, isn't it? What are you going to do then, Jonathan?"

"What do you mean?"

"Can that unsociable guy really keep working at a brewery?"

"Gloss, you've always disliked Amon, haven't you?"

The angel named Gloss shook his wings a little and took a swig of alcohol.

…How am I supposed to like him when he hates me?

Jonathan smiled a little and nodded.

"Yeah, I guess so."

Hearing that, Gloss returned the bottle and clicked his tongue.

He must have been a little drunk because he had apparently let his feelings out as Open Words.

Nothing was more disturbing than having someone else read your emotions, so he applied Verbal Self Control to his thoughts. After calming down and keeping his feelings as unreadable Closed Words, he took a breath and spoke.

"Amon never relaxes around heavenly races like me."

"Do you hate him?"

"I wouldn't say that. I trust your judgment in looking after him. "

Jonathan bent and narrowed his eyes at that.

"So you understand, do you? I will admit he looks like a failure of a demon at first glance, though."

"Yeah, I understand. But the blame for his lack of wings falls on those of us from the heavenly races, doesn't it?"

"Don't worry about it. That's due to the God-Demon War, not you."

"That was a terrible war. It took no time at all to destroy hell."

"And the aftermath even caused a world war in reality."

Jonathan held out his false right arm which expelled white steam from the shoulder like a sigh.

"But a single arm was a small price to pay for protecting this Aerial City."

The fictional world of England had of course been attacked during that world war. They existed in the medium of writing, so there was only one way to attack them from reality: ignore them.

So to start with, many of them had left that safe city of fiction and fought. They had reminded those in reality that monsters existed and they had filled them with fear.

"Not that you all had it much better with most of heaven destroyed."

Gloss shook his head and replied.

"It was a stupid war. It was a complete waste." He sighed. " England was in trouble, but we angels did nothing but fight the demons. And yet we're both residents of Aerial City."

"And all that escaped destruction was a small portion of heaven and the nine chapter title pages in between."

"That's because it was all settled in the brief moment when those chapter title pages were flipped open. And even that led to an unexpected failure. We never thought heaven's information would spread to the humans as Open Words."

Heaven was the spring of knowledge that had gathered all of the world's wisdom. Even if the nine chapter title pages were opened for just an instant, knowledge would overflow from that spring and spill into the real world.

That was what had happened during the war just over a dozen years before.

As a result, tanks, fighter craft, poison gas, and other new weapons had been introduced in the world war and had produced far more deaths than in previous wars.

"It was one of those new tank guns that blew off my right arm. How are you gonna pay me back for that?"

"Isn't that Hard Wolf false arm better than a flesh and blood one?"

Gloss parried Jonathan's words and tapped on the wooden box behind him.

"Well, let's stop being so gloomy and get back. I'll put these unsold leftovers in the warehouse."

Jonathan looked down at the bottle in his hand and found it was almost empty.

He had no interest in an empty bottle, so he chucked it behind him.

After a beat, the two of them heard a metallic sound much like shattering ice and they stood up.

Gloss's white wings swayed in the darkness.

Instead of a steam whistle, they heard a bell and music in the distance.

The music came from a pipe organ.

It had to be a powerful sound to reach this far, but the song sounded lonely out here at the port.

This was the bell and music for twelve o'clock coming from Westminster Cathedral.

And as that ringing and music slowly filled the air, a change occurred on the Thames.

Part 2

The fog covering the river split apart.

It parted like white double-doors opening to either side and it flowed onward.

A boat slowly travelled down the gorge between the foggy cliffs . The boat was loaded with something large covered in a blue sheet and a young man sat on top of that cargo.

The young man was a minister.

He slowly approached on the boat and his form grew clear in the darkness.

He uncomfortably rubbed his very short blond hair. His overall casual aura may have been due to how he wore his minister's outfit with the collar open or due to the round sunglasses he wore in the middle of the night.

His narrow eyes were smiling beyond the sunglasses.

Gloss stepped forward as if replying to that smile.

"Who are you?"

That question was accompanied by what sounded like metal panels piling up. The noise came from the boat.

"!"

Jonathan sensed motion, but when he turned toward it, he no longer saw anyone on the boat. He only saw the blue sheet and the cargo.

He looked up just in case and, to his surprise, he found the young man.

The young man was in London's foggy night sky.

He and his black minister's outfit parted the fog as he leaped. He lightly and casually jumped the five meters from the boat to the wharf. He had made the jump with no running start and from poor footing.

Then he landed.

His feet made no noise as they contacted the ground, but another metallic sound came from inside his clothes. He seemed to be carrying something inside them and he was now about three steps in front of Gloss.

The distant ringing and music from Westminster Cathedral had stopped.

The young man looked up into the night sky as if to check on the lingering tone.

"…" Suddenly, he looked at Gloss. Their eyes met and he raised his right hand to waist height as if in greeting.

"Are we enemies now that I've come ashore?"

As Jonathan heard that line, he also saw the young man's naturally raised hand.

He Overrode the young man's movements to see if he had overlooked anything.

The young man's right hand held a shotgun.

"Gloss!"

"Too late."

Just as Jonathan shouted and the young man muttered quietly, the shotgun fired.

With a great sound of destruction, a head-sized hole appeared in Gloss's stomach.

What had previously filled that hole splattered across the concrete of the wharf.

"I hate angels and god just as much as monsters."

Jonathan prepared to run over to Gloss while listening to the young man's kindly spoken words.

The young man must have sensed Jonathan's intent because he turned toward him with the shotgun still aimed at Gloss. His sharp gaze literally restrained Jonathan.

"…!"

He could not move.

Simply being looked at was restricting his movements, even though he was a Hard Wolf who had once faced a tank in the Great War.

Jonathan watched as Gloss Dis-Selfed. Still not sure what had happened to himself, the angel collapsed and used an arm to

support himself on the wooden box behind him. However, he could not support his body with most of his abdomen gone, so his elbow slipped from the edge of the box and he fell into a sitting position with his wings still spread to the side.

The second shotgun blast sounded out.

Gloss's head and a portion of the box were blown away.

They were both smashed to pieces.

What remained of his body trembled with the slight vestiges of life and then suddenly vanished.

The angel's feathers and the pieces splattered on the concrete all turned to ash just like burning paper. The faint scattering aroma was the smell of a burning angel.

Jonathan said nothing. He simply watched what happened before him.

But the young man did not bother watching Gloss go through the special process of Ashing. He was not looking at Jonathan either.

The narrow eyes beyond his sunglasses were looking straight forward. He stared directly ahead with the sharpness of targeting something.

Jonathan slowly moved his eyes in pursuit of the young man's gaze.

He found two new people standing there.

Part 3

Jonathan saw two people in front of the warehouses lining the wharf.

One was a woman.

Her black hair waved in the wind where it extended below the shawl she wore over her shoulders. The features of her face were those of an adult.

She was the kind of adult who one could easily imagine crying.

He moved his eyes from the woman to the person next to her.

He was a tall man and he gave off a sharp aura.

He comfortably wore a long, dark green coat. The body inside the coat looked thin but not frail. He gave off a sense of defiance and dignity.

Whatever life he had lived, his face was almost entirely expressionless. However, great experience and sharp strength were visible in that face even from a distance.

The two of them looked straight toward the young man holding the shotgun.

The young man smiled as he accepted their gazes and he was the first to speak.

"It's been two weeks, hasn't it, Valeath?"

His smile grew a little before he continued.

"It's been a while since I've seen you too, Moyla. Now, I've brought in the cargo and weapons as originally…planned!"

With that last word, he swung his empty left arm, but he instantly Overrode something in that hand to throw it. It was a long sword in a white scabbard.

It was seeing the afterimage of the scabbard rotating through the air that told Jonathan who this was.

Or rather, it was the smell.

This was the same smell as his prey on the battlefields of the world war a dozen or so years ago.

A monster's prey was humans.

For the first time in over a dozen years, the smell of human flesh and the human world reached his nose.

And there was only one sort of human who would still fight with an anachronistic weapon like a sword.

"Hounds!?"

Some humans had been born to fight and, in some rare instances, one would appear whose power was equal or greater to a monster. A human who used their power to hunt "nonexistent" beings was known as a Hound.

Why would the likes of them be in the monster-filled country of England?

…*Why?*

Valeath, the man in the long coat, caught the flying sword without answering that Opened question.

And he immediately drew the white blade.

The metal audibly sliced through the air.

A silver light at least a meter long appeared in the darkness and the light looked like it could cut through anything and everything.

Valeath stared at the blade that glowed as if wet.

"It really is like you to shoot him right away, Ralf."

"It's only natural for monsters to be killed by humans."

"I meant that you went for the angel first."

Valeath walked toward Jonathan as he spoke.

"Moyla."

With the sword in his right hand, he called his partner's name and Jonathan felt a deep tone in his gut.

"!"

Following the sound, all of the fog filling the wharf vanished in an instant. Wind raced through and formed a circle.

This created an isolate space.

The area expelling the fog grew wider and it encompassed Jonathan.

The woman named Moyla stood at the center of that empty space and she was folding her fingers in a strange shape without losing her seemingly powerless expression.

…A barrier!?

Ralf, the young man dressed like a minister, must have read Jonathan's unintentionally Opened thought because he smiled.

"Moyla's barrier cannot be broken. Not even by an above-average monster."

There was only one reason for a Hound to trap a monster in a barrier: to hunt it.

Jonathan clicked his tongue.

The battle had already begun. As proof of that, Valeath approached with drawn sword in hand and the look in his eyes expressed his intention via Open Words.

…Fight.

Goose bumps covered Jonathan's entire body before his heart could respond to the man's will. His past combat experience, those memories permeating his body, told him escape would be impossible.

However, he could not let himself die here.

He had to tell someone about this. Humans were trying to do something here in the monsters' city of London. The Hounds, those natural enemies of monsters, were beginning something.

"So I can't escape without fighting, hm?"

He spoke that seemingly contradictory statement so he could hear it himself and he strongly Tasked himself.

His voice raced through his body as a Verbal Self Control of his Dis-Selfing thoughts.

He calmed himself down.

The old Hard Wolf looked up into the night sky.

The barrier had cleared away the fog and the moon floated unobstructed in the night sky.

The perfect circle of the moon was exactly the full moon a Hard Wolf desired.

He howled.

“Awooooooooooo!”

A howl was a primitive type of word, so it possessed great power. As a Hard Wolf, he desired the power of the moon and the power of a wolf. He looked up to the heavens in search of it and he howled. He howled with all his might.

Only a wolf could give a wolf's howl.

He Overrode himself into a wolf. He desired to change.

He strongly Tasked himself: Altered, Altered, Altered!

The body exposed to the sunlight rapidly transformed. Before he could take another breath, his nose extended, his ears stood tall, fur sprouted up, his skeleton seemed to swell out, and the air exploded.

The fog, wind, and air swirled around him and his previously human form became that of a wolf. He exposed his true form as a Hard Wolf. His bluish-black fur had faded with age, but his build was well above average.

Powerful light filled his eyes. This was the light of a beast. His fur stood on end as if to reach the heavens. He opened his mouth, bared his fangs, and howled again.

"Awoooooooooooooooooo!"

He faced forward, but not at the swordsman named Valeath. He looked past that man and at the young man named Ralf who had Ashed Gloss.

…I'll kill you first!

He shouted his bestial thoughts.

His Opened intent to kill shot out like a knife and shook Valeath 's coat, but Ralf only smiled.

"Valeath, this might be my job."

He happily cocked the shotgun and the atmosphere of the battlefield linked directly between the Hard Wolf and the young man.

The man and beast faced each other with Valeath in between.

It began in an instant.

Jonathan made a sudden jump. The claws breaking out through his shoes kicked off the ground and launched him into the night air.

But instead of reaching the two men before him, the jump took him to the woman named Moyla.

"…Nh!"

He had used his Open Words as a feint. Faking one's actual intent was much more convincing than only using actions. This slowed Ralf's reaction and likely did the same to Valeath.

The great beast leaped over the men's heads and he landed where only Moyla would be in his line of vision. He then dashed forward on all fours.

His bestial claws tore into the concrete.

His lupine eyes trained on his target. If he defeated this witch, the barrier would vanish.

Targeting a woman was not the gentlemanly thing to do, but desperate times called for desperate measures. Also, the easier target that would lead to the least bloodshed was best.

With the Hard Wolf after her, the witch folded her fingers below her shawl and in front of her chest. She showed no sign of fleeing even with Jonathan's approach. She simply stared straight at him.

And her eyes held a look of pity.

Before he could wonder why, he had approached. As he ran, he held his left arm by his right side in preparation for a diagonal strike from below using the full speed of his charge.

He pulled down his body to pour as much momentum into the strike as possible, but then he noticed the concrete ground in his vision.

The moonlight falling from the night sky cast his shadow there, but another shadow was enveloping his own.

…Someone's above me!?

That thought was immediately followed by an impact.

"!"

He was thrown to the left and he rolled along the ground. Sparks flew when his false right arm struck the concrete.

The sparks were accompanied by the painful sound of scraping metal.

His body twisted as he rolled, the unpleasant sound vanished, and he attempted to right himself.

But when he tried to stand, he tilted to the right and collapsed. His right side was oddly heavy.

…What's going on?

As if to answer his Opened question, something descended from the sky in front of him. A familiar object struck the ground with a splat.

It was his own left arm.

"Wha-?!"

His groan of protest was followed by blood spraying from the severed arm and the stump at his shoulder.

As he doubled over and held his left shoulder with his false arm , a figure wielding a long sword stood in front of him.

It was Valeath.

"…!"

The kneeling Hard Wolf looked up at the man.

The swordsman had seen through Jonathan's feint, jumped, and made his strike, but he was not even out of breath.

Behind him, Jonathan saw the witch sigh and remove the barrier. She looked like she wanted to tell Valeath something, but she coughed instead. It was the kind of deep cough that was unique to the ill.

Even so, Valeath did not turn her way. He continued staring forward without even looking down at Jonathan.

"Ralf, I will now show you how to remove their voice. Don't waste them."

With natural movements, the tip of his sword raced toward Jonathan's throat.

It only took an instant.

No one spoke and Jonathan held his throat with his false arm. However, there was no blood. His fur remained intact and the skin below was not harmed.

Nevertheless, something white lay in a pool of blood between the Hard Wolf and the swordsman.

Valeath reached out and picked up the thumb-sized white object so Jonathan could see.

It was Jonathan's voice.

"This is a solidified voice. It is an organ located in the throat called a Horn."

…What!?

Jonathan tried to shout that word, but he found he could not speak.

That was unsurprising since his Horn was no longer in his throat.

"Your Horn has been removed, so act like it. Ash yourself like that corpse."

The man was referring to Gloss. That angel was also meant to have had his voice removed before he was killed.

These three had indeed come to this city to hunt monsters.

…Are you trying to destroy Aerial City – London!? If you do that, this will go beyond simply deserving revenge!

He used Open Words to ask his question and he received his response from behind.

"You don't seem to understand. In all the many books out there, have you ever read of humans being destroyed by monsters? But you hear about the opposite all the time."

He heard someone raise a gun just behind his ear.

"You monsters are so conceited if you think people are really afraid of you. Humans can hunt monsters. If we wanted to, we could easily destroy this entire country. There's only one reason we haven't done it yet." The young man took a breath. "We took pity on you monsters and protected you. We joined you in your fear of what we could do."

All of Jonathan's fur bristled.

The bleeding from his left shoulder was stopping thanks to the regeneration of a Hard Wolf, but he still could not move. He was surrounded and his enemy was far more powerful than him.

He heard some metallic sounds behind him. He heard something fitting together and a trigger being pulled.

"…!"

But Valeath moved in front of Jonathan and placed a hand on the Hard Wolf's false arm. The roughly bandaged hand had a circular emblem drawn in the colors of a burn.

The brown, discolored bandages loosened and instantly wrapped around the false arm like vines.

"Over Contract. Be destroyed by your own arm."

Unlike before, Jonathan actually moved after Valeath's expressionless words.

Except it was only his false arm that moved. It forcefully swung up as if to point toward the moon.

"!?"

It had left Jonathan's control and the movement was horribly sharp and unhesitating. This was the precise movement of a machine moving as a machine.

The metal claws glittered for an instant. It was a cold and pleasant glitter.

And…

"!"

It struck.

The false arm stabbed deep into the left side of his chest.

It produced a pleasant sound that sent a shudder down his spine.

Needless to say, this alone was not enough. The false hand was embedded up to the wrist, but it began to move about in his flesh. The sound of severing bone rang loudly out. The intermittent sound of sliced muscles sounded painfully in his ears.

The Hard Wolf raised a voiceless scream. As only his breath escaped from his lips, blood burst from his chest, from his fang-lined mouth, from his nostrils, and from his left shoulder.

The blood stopped his silent cry.

A tremendous sound followed only a beat later. It was the wet sound of something being born. The false arm had come out of Jonathan's chest.

…!

The metal hand covered in blood and fat pulled something from his chest with a wonderful sound.

It was his heart.

The false arm crushed the bloody mass in its grip at the same moment as his body collapsed backwards.

"…"

A gun could be heard being put away.

"An Over Contract? I bet he never even imagined a human would use a demon's contract spell. …But, well, it feels like we accomplished something here."

Next, a sword could be heard being sheathed.

"This Hard Wolf was my opponent from the beginning."

Icy killer intent rose like fog, but it was shattered by approaching footsteps.

A woman's voice followed.

"Ralf, I will show you to the hotel we have a room at. It has space for mooring a boat, so can you bring the boat there with the cargo still aboard?"

"Y-yes. If you say so, Moyla."

Even as the humans spoke, the Hard Wolf had yet to Ash.

His death was only a matter of time, but he was still alive.

Part 4

In London, the morning was a time of sleep. Even Berwick Street in the middle of Soho was empty below the morning sun. No one walked along the street and only the occasional early morning stagecoach could be seen.

At one end of that sleeping street was a brewery. The morning sun washed over its old red bricks. It looked like an unsociable but trustworthy place.

The filthy sign above the entrance gave the name “Full Moon Beer Cellar”.

It was of course not running at this time and there were no customers. However, someone did pass by below that sign.

It was a young man with a somewhat defiant look to him.

His black jacket and trousers absorbed the light of the morning sun. A dark outfit like that was preferred by demons, but he lacked the wings that a demon would have.

His sharp eyes looked in the store’s window. The narrow face reflected there had a bruise from a punch which he rubbed gently.

“I’ve gotten rusty.”

He walked to the side of the store, entered the narrow alley, and kicked at the store’s side entrance. It opened with just the one hit.

He brushed up his blond-highlighted bangs, peered inside, and hesitated to enter.

After taking a few breaths, he nodded and silently slipped inside.

“I’m back! This time I beat five in a row for 8 pounds…?”

His shout changed to a question because he had sensed a certain smell.

It was the smell of burning paper that indicated an Ashing.

The ominous scent brought a gold light to his eyes. These were the characteristic eyes of a demon.

There was a trail left by something being dragged along the floor and it continued into the back room.

"…?"

He followed it without hesitation. He walked down the short hallway, reached for the door to the back room, and opened it.

The door hit something and stopped.

"Screw that."

He kicked at the door and heard a metallic sound on the other side.

The door immediately opened, but he found no one in that room that belonged to the store's owner. The bed and the closet were the same as always.

"?"

He tilted his head and Overrode his surroundings in case something had been left behind. That was when he noticed something odd lying in the room.

The odd thing was what the door had caught on before.

It was the false arm belonging to the Hard Wolf named Jonathan.

"What!?"

There was only one way for just the false arm to be here. It was a difficult answer for a normal person to grasp, but this young man accepted it immediately.

A groaning or creaking sigh escaped his lips.

"It's…happening around me again?"

His lowered gaze stopped on the false arm's hand. The metal hand held some kind of brown paper.

He quickly reached for it.

It was parchment, the special paper that had long been used when a demon made a contract.

His fingers hesitated, but after a beat, he tore it from the hand and spread it out.

The false arm's handprint remained on the paper. The handprint was lightly scorched into it because the one who had written the words in blood had Ashed afterwards. As for the contents of the contract…

"Place the other party's handprint on this handprint and act as a guide down to hell. Requester: Jonathan. Contractor:…"

The young man hesitated to read the next word.

He took a deep breath, applied some Verbal Self Control, and read his own name.

"Amon."

At the same time, the door closed behind him. He turned around and found words scratched into the door with the false arm's claws.

This was the final message Jonathan had left for Amon.

"Live on, while fearing no evil whatsoever."

Chapter 1: Sinister Call of the Past

Part 1

A man known simply as the Inspector had a private office on the second floor of Scotland Yard, London's metropolitan police department.

The light of midday entered the large and tidy room through the window and it washed over a man standing by the window.

He was the Inspector.

He wore a brown three-piece suit and the dandy-colored collar was perfectly stiff, so he looked like an elite businessman from the real world. He would have looked perfectly at him in a modernized office district.

But regardless of how he looked, he could not be human if he lived in London.

Even so, no one could say anything more than that because not a single person in London knew his identity. No one knew his race , his name, or even his initials. They only knew he had a somewhat troublesome personality and he excelled at Overriding and Overlossing.

He demonstrated that now by Overriding a cigar into his mouth out of nowhere. The tip of the cigar suddenly lit, so it seemed he had a match or lighter Overlossed somewhere.

He exhaled some smoke while making sure it did not touch his gray-streaked moustache.

He brushed a hand through his hair, sat on the large work desk by the window, and crossed his legs in a calculated fashion. The action created a sharp noise that refused to be ignored.

After that, he glanced toward the wall and his reflection in a tall , narrow mirror.

"Yes."

He posed as if testing himself and slightly adjusted his tie.

"The coloring is wonderful. Is this what they call Italian quality? No, or is this thanks to my own quality?"

He breathed a satisfied sigh and seemed to be in an excellent mood.

"Yes, truly a man of the heavens."

But as soon as he said that…

"What are you doing, idiot?"

He turned toward the blunt tone one would expect of an older sister.

A uniformed woman stood at the huge door into the office. She had the well-formed eyes of a werecat and they were giving the Inspector a look of pity.

He completely ignored the look and moved to the window while thinking about the backlight.

"Oh? Fir, I thought you were off duty today. What do you need ?"

"C'mon, now. Everyone was called in because of the murders this morning. Isn't that why you're here, too?"

Fir sighed and swept back her high ponytail. Her cyan hair darkened toward the front and it gently swayed behind her. Her eyes remained on the Inspector.

"So don't ask what I need. It's my job to help you when you have a job, so try to act more like my boss."

"Don't blame me. A capable man is always busy. And as you work for me, you are a capable secretary who-…"

"Yes, yes, yes. Quit pretending to be a dandy gentleman and get in your seat. We've got a lot of paperwork today."

"I can read paperwork while I stand."

"You need to sign it," she snapped back.

When she placed the paperwork on the desk, it thudded down like a piece of luggage.

"You want my autograph that badly? Well, if you insist."

"I don't want it. This is just part of the job."

"What an unpleasant young girl."

The Inspector reluctantly sat in his seat and placed the cigar in the ashtray.

He lightly cleared his throat, rested his elbow on the desk, used some Verbal Self Control, and Overrode the mood he was giving off.

"Now, then. Fir, what kind of case is this one?"

"If you want to know what this job is about, just read the paperwork."

He frowned when he saw her point at the paperwork on the desk.

"Are you really my secretary?"

"I do sometimes wish I wasn't."

"A secretary needs to at least summarize all this paperwork!"

"This *is* the summarized version. And it's your fault for letting it pile up this much."

"Oh, c'mon."

"Aren't you supposed to live as the quintessential dandy? So get to work."

"Wait, Fir. Listen."

The Inspector raised a finger at the perfect angle and with the perfect timing.

"You keep talking about work, but I deal with trouble, not work !"

"Trouble? All you ever do is cause that."

"When have I ever caused any trouble!?"

"Well… Okay, you can start by signing this permit."

"Don't ignore me!"

Without looking up at the Inspector, Fir spread out a few pieces of paperwork on the desk.

"Look, even a monkey can do this."

"You think I am on the level of a monkey, don't you?"

"Well, of course I do."

"I'll prove you wrong one of these days," he grumbled.

He pulled a quill from the pen holder, checked on the ink, and quickly began signing the papers. He moved through the papers placed before him at a decent pace.

He was quite fast.

"…"

As his hand flipped though the paperwork, Fir watched to make sure he was doing it right.

At the fifth, sixth, or seventh page, she quickly snatched the cigar from the ash tray and naturally pressed it against his hand.

It produced a quiet sizzling sound for a moment and his hand stopped moving.

"Hot, hot, hot, hot, hot! Fir! What did I do to deserve that!?"

"Your signature is too messy, you stupid old man. People are going to think it's just an ink stain!"

"My signature always looks like this!"

"Liar. I've been watching and every last one of them is different."

"I like to be original."

"Shut up! Stop making up excuses!"

After shouting, Fir's shoulders drooped. She could not let herself get so worked up.

"I always end up Altering so quickly when I'm around you."

"I like it better when you're the Siamese cat."

"My claws are sharper that way, you know?"

She used some Verbal Self Control.

He Overlossed the burn on his hand, ignored it, and began signing again. This time, he did it properly. His pace had dropped, but it was still acceptable.

After three, four, or five, the number of completed documents reached the double digits and continued to grow. The quill moved back and forth between the papers and the ink pot.

"…"

Silence fell over them.

However, it was broken by a light knock on the office door.

The Inspector gave some Open Words as he continued signing.

…I'm busy, so have them come back later.

Fir nodded in understanding.

"Come in."

The Inspector bared his teeth and glared up at her as the door opened.

A slender form slipped through the cracked-open door on unsteady feet.

"Excuse me. It's Klausl."

She was a girl from the main office.

She entered the private office with her eyes closed and bowed. Her long blonde hair spilled from the shoulders of her black apron skirt and over her chest.

The Inspector watched as she frantically fixed her hair.

"What do you need, Klausl?"

"Oh, right. Um, the reception desk has been getting a flood of complaints about late paperwork and we don't know what to do."

Fir glared at him.

"See? Your laziness is causing trouble for Klau."

"You don't have to talk to me like I'm a child," he complained.

"Um, Fir? Is something wrong?" asked Klausl.

"There's always something wrong with this monkey."

She showed no mercy.

"I am not a monkey!"

"Not genetically, maybe. But you're about as capable as one."

Klausl tilted her head with her eyes still closed, so the Inspector spoke to her.

"This is between the two of us, so do not worry about it."

She replied with a pure smile.

"Understood. You can rest easy because I will not worry about it in the slightest."

"I'd…kind of like it if you worried a little bit, though."

"?"

Fir casually waved a hand toward Klausl's confused look.

"You can ignore what this…thing says, Klau. Any news on the murder case?"

"Yes," she immediately replied. "A lot is still unknown about it. The paperwork you were given before has the information on the victims and the surrounding situation. Currently, we have called in Amon, the one who first reported the murders."

That name instantly changed the atmosphere in the room.

It was the Inspector and Fir who caused that drop in the room's temperature.

"Again?" muttered the man.

Fir turned her back on that word and naturally looked toward Klausl.

"Don't say that, Inspector. It isn't like he was the killer."

"Do you know him?" asked Klausl.

"Back when I lived on the streets as the leader of a group of Urban Heroes, he led our combat unit."

Fir's tone was emotionless as she talked about her childhood.

The Inspector gave a deep nod and faced straight forward.

"And I arrested him once." He took a breath. "He was still on probation I believe."

"Yes, one of the victims was a Mr. Jonathan Holland who had taken him in. Amon has an alibi and it has been proven that he was not the murderer."

At that point, Klausl tilted her head.

"What kind of person is Amon? I am about to bring him breakfast."

Fir was the one to answer. She crossed her arms and chose her words carefully.

"Are you familiar with the idea of a death wish?"

"No, I'm not."

"There once was a guy who always charged head-first and alone into fights and battles he had no chance of winning. No matter how much he was injured, he would keep fighting. He probably wanted to burn out and die."

"…"

"The one who would always seek out a place to die like that is Death Wish Amon. He's a demon, but he doesn't use that power and he has no wings."

After some hesitation, she summed up her description.

"He's a pitiable guy."

Part 2

Amon was certain that nightmares had a flavor.

It was an unpleasant flavor. It was raw like blood or like boiling seawater.

Whenever he had a nightmare, that flavor would endlessly seep into his mouth, his nostrils, and every last pore on his body.

It felt like sinking into a marsh. No matter how much he screamed or struggled, there was nothing he could do. He could not fight it.

He knew this because he had had the same nightmare again and again and again for so very long.

He was having it again now.

In the dream, he saw himself as a young child in a stone room. However, that child was not alone. He was with a woman who seemed to be his mother and they were hiding below a stone table.

The mother held him and stared at the room's entrance without even blinking.

"Not again."

His mind was calm in the dream and his mind's quiet words sounded exhausted.

This was entirely normal and yet he still could not get used to it.

The dream continued on.

The young child turned his gaze in fear.

His eyes were staring at something. A figure stood in the doorway to the room.

The figure had wings, but they were not the wings of a demon. These were a dove's wings.

In other words, this was an angel.

An angel was normally mostly white as the color of light, but the spear in his hand, the armor he wore, and even his wings were dyed crimson.

The young child let out a small scream when he saw the angel.

At the same time, the angel raised the spear in both hands and slowly entered the room.

“Stay away!”

Amon shouted as he watched the dream play out, but his voice was Overlossed by the presence of the nightmare. It was ignored.

The armor on the angel’s feet clanked as he stepped on the stone floor. It was a cold sound.

The mother faced the angel with her back to her fearful child. The hunter and prey had already confirmed each other’s presences .

The young child clung to his mother’s back and trembled.

Amon knew it was useless, but he tried to run into the scene.

He panicked and shouted again.

“Run away! Hurry! Don’t try to protect me!”

But his mind’s pleas did not reach her.

The angel pulled back his spear and his face was filled with the glee of taking down his prey. Seeing that kind of look for the first time shocked the young child to the point of tears.

When scared, children would cry.

That voice stopped the angel and his gaze turned directly toward the young child.

The angel knocked the mother out of the way with the shaft of the spear. The woman collapsed to the cold floor without even crying out and the angel shouted vulgar words at her before facing the child again.

He was planning to kill the crying child first. Amon knew what happened next and he knew there was no way for him to stop it.

"Stop! I don't want to see this!"

He tried to close his eyes, but his mind continued to show it to him.

The spear moved quickly. Its path took it straight toward the center of the child's forehead. The child stopped crying and stared straight at the glint of the coming spear tip.

And…

"Stay away!"

Just as Amon cried out, the young child was knocked out of the way.

"…!"

His mind gasped at this afterimage of the past.

The spear meant for the child instead plunged into the mother that moved in front of him.

The dream was silent, but he could swear he heard the low sound of metal piercing flesh.

The spear passed diagonally from her back and out her stomach and the muddy dark red blood of a demon spilled to the floor.

The young child endured the pain of falling to the floor and got up. His gaze naturally reached the stabbed mother who had fallen to a sitting position.

"…"

The mother's lips clearly called Amon's name.

The child did not understand any of what was happening, but he answered her voice with a small nod.

She must have been satisfied because she let out a quick breath and smiled.

It was a smile of relief.

"Why are you smiling?"

The mother did not answer his mind's question and she slowly collapsed the rest of the way to the floor. She continued smiling all the while.

"Hey!"

The child hesitantly started toward his mother, but he stopped.

But not because the angel that had stabbed his mother was staring at him. He had seen a bright light beyond the angel and in the room's entranceway.

It was a white light and it had a great presence as if it had solidified.

"…?"

The angel must have sensed the approaching light's presence because he quickly turned, kneeled, and set his spear down with the tip pointed backwards. This was how a retainer greeted his lord.

By that time, a man stood in the room's entranceway.

The strange man carried light with him and his wings were larger and more numerous than the angel's. His simple white robe was immaculate and it shined in the light emitted by his wings.

He may have been a god.

He faced the kneeling angel.

…Stop. The child has not sinned.

"I haven't sinned? If that wasn't a sin, what is!? I killed my mother!"

The pressure of guilt was Overridden on the dream and began to press down on Amon's mind.

"I've lost so many people. If it wasn't for me, none of them would have-…"

Unable to hear Amon's cries, the god slowly entered the room.

He approached the young child who did not know what was happening and picked up his small body.

"Stop! Don't take me away from her!"

The child must have realized he was being separated from his mother because he began to cry in the god's arms and he reached for the woman lying on the floor.

Feeling someone grab that outstretched hand, Amon woke from the dream.

Part 3

Amon jumped up at the warm sensation surrounding his right hand.

He tried to catch his breath as he looked at his right hand and found a slender white hand on his own.

"…"

He looked up and gently Overrode the feminine hand.

He found a girl there.

She wore the clothes of an office worker and looked like the quiet type.

She was kneeling on the floor and looking worriedly toward him with her eyes closed.

"Are you okay? It sounded like you were having an awful nightmare."

"Sorry," he tried to say.

However, he found he could not speak properly. His throat was too dry.

His scratchy voice made the girl smile.

"Don't be sorry for having a nightmare. …Oh, you need some water, don't you?"

He nodded.

She slowly let go of his hand and stood. He saw her approach the bedside table which contained a tray of breakfast likely meant for him.

She poured a glass of water from the pitcher on the tray.

"Here."

He gulped down the entire glass in one go and belched.

"My, how rude."

He ignored her bitter smile and let out a deep breath. After some Verbal Self Control, he felt his body had finally calmed down . Only then did he remember where he was and more thoroughly Overrode his surroundings.

He was in Scotland Yard's nap room. It was a fairly large room, but it only contained bunk beds covered in white sheets. He had been sleeping in the bottom bunk closest to the entrance.

…Last night…

He had been taken in directly from Jonathan's brewery and suddenly thrown into an interrogation room. After being questioned like he was the murderer, he had been told to stay put in here.

The cement wall was covered in the color of mildew and it was a little damp. The only light came from the skylight. The atmosphere of the room may have bene part of what had given him the nightmare.

He nodded and faced the girl standing next to the bed. She wore a hairband in her soft-looking blonde hair and she still had her eyes closed.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Klausl."

Amon scratched his head at the uninformative answer. Still smiling, she gently held the tray out to him.

"Are you sure you're okay? You looked like you were suffering."

"It's nothing."

He took the tray and picked up the spoon, but then he stopped.

"Was it that obvious I was having a nightmare?"

Her smile vanished and she nodded.

"Yes. You said 'help me' again and again. You were clearly suffering."

"I see. …Sorry."

"Instead of apologizing, please eat."

He looked up in thought when he heard that, but he soon began working at the food on the tray with great intensity.

He focused on eating.

He continued making a racket for a while and Klausl asked him a question.

"How does it taste?"

He did not answer. He was not the kind of guy who could make small talk like that. He simply continued eating without saying a word.

Klausl watched him, sighed, and gave a vague comment.

"Breakfast today was made by the Yard's #1 chef."

He had a reflexive thought about that.

…I see. That explains why it's so good.

But…

"Oh, thank you very much! I was the one that made it!"

Amon just about spat out the food in his mouth, but she ignored that and happily folded her hands.

"Thank goodness. You were a sudden guest, so I wasn't very confident."

"Don't read my Open Words."

He just barely managed to get those words out.

"But you won't answer me otherwise."

She was right about that.

It bothered him that things were not going like normal.

"Don't get so excited just because I said your food was good. Are you not very smart or something?"

"My, how rude. I'll have you know I have a Level 2 government worker license."

"That isn't what I meant. This is a more essential issue."

"Oh, so you admit I'm skilled?"

"Hold on. Are you making fun of me? I'm Death Wish Amon, you know?"

"I'm not sure what you mean. You seem like a perfectly normal demon to me."

His expression grew stern.

"Can't you see I don't have any wing-…"

He trailed off when he looked at her closed eyes. Without opening her eyes, she gave him a completely innocent smile.

"…"

The sternness immediately vanished from his face and an exhausted sigh left his mouth.

Without saying another word, he resumed eating. He ate more slowly this time.

After a while, he finished everything on the tray.

"Are there seconds?"

"Sorry, but no."

Klausl took the tray he held out and simply smiled.

"You are entirely different from what Fir and the others said about you."

"What did she tell you?"

"I only asked what you had done, but based on that, I thought you would be a scary person. I heard you singlehandedly destroyed a mafia group two years ago and-…"

"Don't talk about that."

He cut off her words, but her smile did not waver.

She did not seem remotely frightened. In fact, she almost looked relieved.

He glanced over at her and felt uncomfortable.

But then…

"Oh, you still eating?"

Amon and Klausl turned toward the casual voice and found Fir standing in the nap room's entrance.

Amon snapped at her before she could say anything.

"Fir, what's this about you telling her all sorts of things about me?"

"I only told her the truth. She could find it all for herself if she checked the Yard's files."

Fir did not sound remotely bothered by what she had done and she turned toward Klausl before continuing.

"What surprises me is that you came here on your own, Klau. Not many people would want to bring Amon food on their own after hearing what he's done."

"I thought it would be okay. I really did."

Hearing that, Amon clicked his tongue, shook his head in annoyance, and faced Fir.

"So why are you here? Did you bring me dessert?"

"Oh?" said Klausl. "But your breakfast had an orange with it."

"I wasn't serious!"

He shouted angrily back at her, but caught himself and applied Verbal Self Control. Meanwhile, he heard Fir trying to suppress laughter.

"Looks like things aren't going your way, Amon. But that's not surprising. Klau's the one person in the Yard who can actually hold a proper conversation with the Inspector."

"The Inspector, huh? We're really digging up my past today, aren't we?"

He took a breath.

"Fir, hurry up and tell me what you want. Are you detaining me? Am I being interrogated again?"

"Someone would almost think you'd had some bad experiences in the Yard."

"Maybe that's because I have."

"Hmm. Then do you not want to see what I'm holding here?"

He looked at her outstretched hand and Overrode a piece of paper there.

"We're doing a word investigation of Old Jon's shop, so we don 't want you going in there until the results are in. This tells you where to find the apartment the Yard's prepared for you. Look."

The paper contained a simple map, a room number, and some other information.

…I'm supposed to live there?

He Opened his doubt and Fir laughed.

"Don't worry. It's a normal apartment and it's not too far from the shop," she explained. "Well, that should settle it. And I was the one to find the room, so you'd better not complain."

Part 4

It was extremely rare to see the sunset in London. The city was so constantly covered in fog that it was known as the City of Fog.

However, that meant it would sink gently into the depths of the night. There was no dramatic change in color as it naturally filled with darkness and the countless gas lights almost looked like will-o'-the-wisps.

The Savoy Hotel was located along the Thames which flowed through the center of London. The rooms on the hotel's top floor gave an excellent view of the city as it filled with life.

Valeath was watching the foggy city from one of those windows .

"…"

The inside of the window perfectly reflected him and the room behind him.

It was a large room. London hotels liked to preserve the ambiance of the city, but this one had bright electric lights installed . This was one of England's top hotels and it seemed to target even the rarest sort of guests. After all, electric lights produced human-made light.

The window's reflection showed Moyla standing a short distance away in that light.

Somewhere in the distance, a bell rang and lonely-sounding pipe organ music accompanied it. That was the hourly signal from Westminster Cathedral.

Just as the bell finished its six rings and the music stopped, the large door reflected in the window opened.

Ralf stepped inside.

He still wore his modified minister's outfit and he spoke cheerfully.

"I'd always heard British food was bad, but that was surprisingly good. The roast beef at this place's restaurant was especially great."

At that point, he realized the room's atmosphere was far from cheerful, so he adjusted his sunglasses.

"Valeath, what did you want to discuss in today's meeting?"

Valeath kept his arms crossed and spoke quietly.

"We will finish this in three days' time."

"Of course," answered Ralf.

He sighed and Overrode himself. Unlike when he had entered the room, he was giving the same smile as when he had shot Gloss.

"Based on that Hard Wolf from last night, the monsters here won't be a problem. I suppose three days should be enough to gather the necessary number of voices."

"But Master Valeath, if we rush this too much, we might make a mistake somewhere."

That calm comment came from Moyla who pulled her shawl tight as if she were cold. Her face looked somewhat pale in the window's reflection.

"We were given a month for this, so there is no need to hurry."

Valeath said nothing to her, so Ralf did instead.

"Don't worry, Moyla. Valeath and I are more than enough for this. You can focus on resting. After all, London's fog is not just fog . It's nasty stuff called smog."

In the reflection, Moyla looked at Valeath. She clearly wanted to say something as her eyes overlapped with the city of London.

However, Valeath did not respond to that look. He simply turned around slowly.

"In three days, we will set up the Babel Cannon in the place we have prepared. We will gather the voices of 121 Arche races by then. Do you understand, Ralf?"

"I do." Ralf smiled. "But what are you going to have Moyla do? "

Moyla answered that question without even a moment's delay.

"I will protect Master Valeath. That is my job."

She was clearly in a hurry to speak and Ralf looked quite disappointed to hear it.

"Why do you have to say it yourself?"

After a complicated sigh, he turned his back on Valeath and purposefully let his military boots sound on the floor.

"Valeath, let me tell you something interesting. The Hard Wolf you supposedly eliminated last night actually managed to survive for a bit longer."

There was a hint of testing in his voice and he seemed to be saying this was worth showing some interest in.

That must have caught Valeath's attention because he glanced toward the other man.

Expecting the glance, Ralf turned around in front of the door with his usual smile.

"Because you didn't wait until he Ashed, it's become a bit of an incident in the city. And…that Hard Wolf had adopted a strange young man. He's a demon, but he has no wings."

"Is there some problem related to that young man?"

"Who knows. You can check on that for yourself. I figured you would be the best judge of whether he had sworn revenge over the death of his adoptive father. Also…please remember one thing."

Ralf placed a hand on the door as he spoke.

"It may be Moyla's job to serve you, but she isn't your property."

Valeath said nothing.

Neither did Moyla. She simply hung her head.

Ralf opened his mouth again when he saw that, but he stopped himself. Instead, he opened the door and left.

"…"

Moyla briefly looked out the open door and then turned to Valeath.

"Master Valeath, are you angry?"

"About what?"

"He made it sound like I…"

She trailed off.

On the other hand, Valeath's words were calm and strong.

"Unlike you or Ralf, I have almost no emotions thanks to the Over Contract."

The bandaged hand sticking out of his coat's sleeve had a circular emblem drawn on it.

"When a human uses a demon's spells, darkness fills their soul."

That wore away at their emotions and humanity. When someone like that died, there was no escaping hell.

Moyla looked at the back of Valeath's hand.

"If this mission succeeds, I hope you can meet Lady Melda in heaven."

"Do not mention that."

For once, Valeath actually interfered in what someone said.

He gently shook his head.

"She is not for you to think about. We simply need to gather voices and use the Babel Cannon…"

He took a breath and said something absurd.

"To drop heaven down on London."

Chapter 2: Deadly Activation

Part 1

As soon as he left the Yard, Amon was overrun by work to get his life in order.

It would not have been so bad if he only had to move, but he had also been asked to deal with Jonathan's brewery.

By the time he closed the shop, got the inventory in order, cancelled the wharf warehouse rental, and brought all the paperwork to the municipal office's late night service window, it was morning.

Just like the day before, he returned home far too late.

Out of habit, he started toward the brewery he had lived in with Jonathan, so he had to change direction.

"My room's this way now."

The morning was still dark as he walked through the residential Soho Square. The stone-paved road, brick-paved sidewalk, and gas lights all looked oddly faded.

…I must be tired.

His thoughts were answered by the deep, sinking bell and music indicating the top of the hour. The strangely clear sound resembled the colors of the sky as dawn arrived.

The bell rang five times.

He stopped to count the number and applied Verbal Self Control as the ringing reverberated through his body. Once he began walking again, his pace was quicker and he looked in the windows of the shopping district. The stores run by nocturnal races were about to close.

"Maybe I should eat something now."

Only then did he realize someone was staring at him.

Without a doubt, a weakly murderous gaze was focused on the back of his neck.

"Did the Yard send out someone to monitor me?"

He frowned and slowed his pace a little.

He looked over his shoulder a bit, but he did not look with his eyes. He used Overriding to instead read his surroundings.

…*Oh?*

He found someone who worked for the Yard almost too easily.

They were quite close by. He recognized their presence at the boutique across the road.

It was a terribly defenseless presence that did not even hide its location. In other words, it was not the presence of an observer.

"…"

Confused, Amon stopped walking and looked over at the large show window of the boutique.

He saw a girl that he recognized.

She was the blind girl named Klausl.

She held some modest clothing that ignored the latest trends and faced the half-fishwoman with beautiful scales who worked at the boutique.

Klausl was chatting with the boutique worker and was clearly not monitoring Amon.

…Is she out shopping on her way home from the Yard? How lovely.

He gave a bitter smile of self-deprecation and looked around again.

He could not sense anyone other than the girl in the boutique, but he still felt a gaze on the back of his neck.

It was not a pleasant feeling.

"…"

He began walking again and sped up to draw out whoever it was. He hurried as he sidestepped the signs that had been standing there for several years now and slipped between them and the gas lights.

"Kyah!"

Suddenly, he just about ran into someone leaving a nearby bakery. They did not actually collide, but he must have frightened the other person. Her blue skirt spread out like a flower and she fell on her butt.

He reflexively looked down at her.

"That was close. Watch where you're going, you idiot."

But then he gasped.

The person sitting before him with a dazed look was Klausl who had been in the boutique just a second before.

She sat on the brick sidewalk and looked up at him in confusion .

"Eh?" he muttered.

He turned back toward the boutique, but he could not see inside it from this angle.

…?

A grim look covered his brow and he looked back at Klausl who held a paper bag of bread and nodded.

"Sorry. I wasn't paying attention to where I was going, Amon."

"Eh? O-oh, yeah. It was your fault."

Amon gave that terribly awkward response and thought about the situation.

It had taken him a few dozen seconds to walk from the boutique to here, so it would have taken Klausl about the same amount of time. However, she would not have had enough time to end her conversation with the boutique worker, arrive here ahead of him, and leave the store holding a bag of bread.

…?

He must have strongly Tasked and Opened his confusion because Klausl tilted her head as she stood up.

"What is it?"

"Oh, nothing."

He suddenly noticed a difference between the girl in the boutique and this one holding the paper bag.

Their clothes were different.

The previous one had been wearing the uniform of a Yard office worker.

This Klausl's clothes were similar, but the decorations were slightly different.

"I see."

He nodded and applied Verbal Self Control. It was not uncommon to think a stranger was someone you knew.

…That's right. And right now I need to find whoever's observing me.

"Observing you?" asked Klausl.

"Don't read my Open Words."

"Oh, sorry. B-but, um… Excuse me."

"What?" he asked without bothering to hide his annoyance.

"Do you like bread?"

The question was so sudden and thoughtless that his mouth simply hung open for a bit.

"…Eh?"

"Um, there are some people in London who can't eat certain things. …For example, there are those who have to eat carrots or can't eat garlic or salt. So I just wanted to ask."

…That's right.

He just about answered, but quickly realized he was being an idiot.

"W-wait just a second."

"Yes? What is it?"

"Why on earth are you asking this out of the blue in the middle of the city?"

With her eyes still closed, Klausl thought for a moment.

"I suppose you're right. …Okay, I would like to ask a question. May I?"

Amon just about collapsed right then and there.

"I wasn't asking you to go through some kind of official procedure!"

"But you said my question was too sudden…"

…*Someone help me.*

Amon let out a defeated sigh which was rare for him.

"I may not be one to talk, but do you have screw loose in your head or something?"

"Oh, my. That sounds serious. I need to ask father about that."

"Are you messing with me?"

His shoulders drooped and Klausl must have picked up on his frustration because she seemed to give up on asking her strange question. Something akin to sadness reached him much like Open Words.

"It seems I caught you at a bad time. …Sorry."

"…"

He remained silent, hesitated for a moment, but ultimately turned his back.

He walked off at a quick pace and scratched his head.

"What a strange girl."

As he rushed away, he once more felt the gaze of the observer he had nearly forgotten about.

It seemed they were sticking with him no matter what.

…They sure are persistent.

He checked the road and saw a stagecoach rushing down the stone pavement. Amon waved toward it and the skeleton driver brought the two headless horses known as Nightmares to a stop.

The dry voice produced by the skeleton man's cheap artificial vocal cords spoke cheerfully.

"Keh keh keh. Where to? Ee hee hee hee."

"How far can you go?"

"With me driving, you could go as far as hell. How about it?"

"Just take me wherever."

Amon pulled a ten pence coin from his jacket and tossed it over. The skeleton man caught it with a dry sound from his palm.

"Keh keh keh. Good, good! I'll take you around for fifteen minutes. I'm also carrying a cute young lady, so don't try anything . Ee hee hee hee!"

"Keep up that nonsense and I'll break some of those bones of yours."

With that, Amon climbed inside the enclosed passenger car. It had room for six with two three-person sofas facing each other. It was a common layout.

"Now, then."

He took a breath just as the stagecoach began to move.

The observer would be unable to keep up on foot, so they would have to react in some way.

"Oh, right."

Just as he started to look out the window, he remembered the other passenger the skeleton man had mentioned.

He Overrode the inside of the passenger car and saw a girl in the opposite seat.

The person the driver had called a "cute young lady" had her head resting on the windowsill and her eyes closed in sleep. The happy look on her face suggested she was having a good dream.

However, Amon was dumbfounded when he saw her.

"What…the hell?"

He stared at her.

The girl in front of him was clearly Klausl.

"Wah!"

His scream did not come out properly. He frantically half-rolled and half-jumped off of the accelerating stagecoach. He gently hopped on the stone pavement and landed.

His breathing showed how panicked he was, but he did not have time for Verbal Self Control. However, he did manage to Close his thoughts so no one could see into his confused mind.

"What is going on?"

He returned to the sidewalk and turned to the leaving stagecoach.

"…"

It must have turned a corner because it had vanished from the road.

He frowned and saw his face reflected in a nearby store show window.

He was amazingly pale.

"What the hell is this?"

He stared into the show window and saw a smiling girl reaching toward him with her eyes closed on the other side. Or at least, he thought he did.

He quickly looked away and checked his surroundings for the observer's presence, but he could no longer find it due to his panic.

"This isn't like me at all."

He gently shook his head Overrode his appearance, and began walking down the sidewalk.

But suddenly…

"Oh, it's Amon."

As soon as he saw the smile peering at him from the side, he began to run.

"Waaaahhh!"

He shouted almost at the top of his lungs.

After all, he had seen the exact same expression but in another different outfit. This time it was a light apron skirt, the kind of coat worn on a trip, and a travel bag.

This was creepy.

He shuddered at the thought that everyone in London looked like that now.

He ran and ran.

He suddenly realized he was going the wrong way. He had fallen into old habits and run to his previous home in Jonathan's brewery.

But he did not care. He was gasping for breath as he trudged up to the store that had a half-closed garage and sat down. Even he could tell all the color had left his face.

"I-I'm going to die…"

He took a deep breath and let it out.

"Are you okay?"

He nodded at the voice.

"Just tired."

"You must have had a rough time. …Here, have some water."

"Oh, thanks."

He took the glass and quickly drank the water.

…Isn't there something odd about this?

He did not want to realize anything more, but the cause of that feeling approached him.

A shadow fell over his face and he detected a faint scent of perfume.

"You should get some rest."

When her face came into view, he stopped breathing altogether.

…Why are you here!?

Klausl smiled when she read his Open Words.

"I acted as a witness to the word investigation held here this morning."

And yet Amon had been running all over trying to get away from her.

…You're kidding!

He stood up.

"Ah! Where are you going!?"

He ignored her cry and dashed away. He tried to cut across the road and escape.

On his second or third step, she called out to him.

"Amon!"

He turned toward her on reflex and he saw her pointing in the direction he was moving.

"There's a car coming!"

"What?"

The instant he faced forward, he saw exactly what she had warned him of.

Consciousness was an easy thing to lose.

And just before he did, he saw two or three Klausls inside the car plowing into him.

Part 2

Scotland Yard was England's national police and London's city police. It was a large-scale organization, but it handled a great number of cases.

And currently, it was facing the greatest case since its founding. Perhaps even the greatest in England's history. The Yard was operating at full capacity, so no employee, department, or location was taking a break.

Fir did not get a bite to eat until 1:30 PM that day. That was normally the time for post-lunch tea.

She bought two servings of freshly made fish and chips from a bandaged man running a street food cart and raced back to the Inspector's room. She had trained on this door, so she could fully open it with a single kick.

"Take that! It's refueling time! Do you want salt or vinegar?"

"Salt."

The Inspector's response seemed somewhat arbitrary and Fir Overrode the room.

It was filled with documents. Her memory was not the most reliable, but she had a feeling the amount of documents had grown since she left.

"By any chance, did a forty-second turn up?"

She nimbly walked across the room while making sure not to tread on the scattered papers with her heels.

"How did this many people end up dead in a single night?"

No response came from beyond the work desk that had been transformed into a barricade by all the papers piled up on it. The Inspector seemed to be giving this serious thought for once. Fir shrugged and circled behind the desk.

She found the man sitting in his chair and staring at one document in particular.

She held out the wrapped serving of fish and chips.

"Here, Inspector."

"Hm? Oh, thank you."

He took the food wrapped in oil paper, sighed, and placed the report on top of the pile.

"I'm not sure what to do. The forty-second and forty-third came in at the same time."

"What did the word investigation say?"

Fir began eating the fried fish first as the Inspector brought a hand to his forehead at the perfect angle.

"This is a very important case."

"Well, yes. A lot of people have ended up dead."

He shrugged at that and shook his head.

"Nn, that isn't quite what I meant. I am getting the feeling that no one but me can solve this case."

"…What?"

"Strange and similar massacres are spreading through London! Who can save the city from this evil but me? Heh heh heh. I will personally solve this case. If that is not important, then what is? Now, call the newspapers and the radio stations, Firry."

"Don't call me Firry, you stupid old man!"

"Ow ow ow! Don't pinch me!"

Fir looked up at the shouting Inspector.

"So in other words, you're taking full control of this case?"

"Yes, I am."

"Are you saying all of these deaths were murders committed in the same way as Old Jon's?"

He nodded.

"Forty three in a single night easily breaks Jack the Ripper's record. And at the moment, we know two things."

He raised two fingers and folded down one.

"First, the murders are being committed by more than one person. The blood stains at the crime scenes show two different types of shed blood. The first is a stream of blood in a single direction such as from a severed artery. The other is a splattering of flesh and blood as if from an explosion."

"So the first would be a cut from a blade and the other some kind of explosive?"

More or less, Opened the Inspector.

"The other mystery comes from the word investigator's inspection of the blood stain ash. None of the ashes contain the elements of a voice."

"A voice?" Fir asked blankly.

The Inspector placed a hand on his throat.

"There is a slight projection of bone here, right? Due to that shape, the organ is known as a Horn. Well, that and because it produces sound."

"What about that Horn?"

"The Horn and only the Horn was taken from the bodies and that organ is what allows us to shout and produce words. But that isn't all. All forty three victims were from different races."

To produce words was to produce power, so what did it mean that the source of that power was being stolen? And why from so many different races?

Fir thought for a while, but she was not going to find an answer so easily.

"What does this mean, Inspector?"

"I don't know, but I have a bad feeling about it. Either way, it would take great ability to slaughter so many of London's residents."

Having finished off the contents of his oil paper wrapping, he balled it up and tossed it away. He then Overrode the previous document back into his hand.

Fir peered down at it.

"A report on Amon? Why?"

"This is just my instincts talking, but I have a feeling that young man is at the center of this case too."

"Is that why you had Klau monitor him?"

He looked up at the annoyed tone of her voice.

"Oh, you knew about that?"

"A call from her came in down below. What in the world are you thinking?"

"I thought she would be the best for the job. You said she didn't fear him, didn't you?"

"Yes, but…"

"Are you jealous of her being so close to him?"

Fir smiled bitterly.

"It isn't that. I can't get near him. It would be too tragic."

She Closed her thoughts so no one could read them.

The Inspector looked curiously at her, so she put on a devilish smile.

"Hey, Inspector. When you first saw Klau, you asked why she didn't open her eyes, didn't you?"

"Hm? …Oh, yes. I do remember doing that."

She gave a deep nod.

"But when Amon saw her, he didn't ask about her eyes. Probably because he doesn't have any wings."

She took a breath.

"Inspector, what kind of demon is he?"

"Isn't he a taciturn demon who doesn't think about others and always acts like he wants to die?"

"Not that. What about when he had his wings?"

She leaned forward as she asked him.

"Just like with the case two years ago, you always treat him differently. And the unit you put together to capture him back then had anti-demon god level equipment."

Part 3

The next thing Amon knew, he was alone in an apartment.

However, this was not the room Fir had given him. It was the familiar place he had lived two years ago before his probation period under Jonathan.

The table in front of him was a cheap wooden dining table. Sitting on the table was the modest dinner he had bought with his own money.

At that point, his mind alone woke up.

"It's that nightmare again."

The Amon in the dream rested his legs on the table and began to eat and an Amon that existed only as a mind watched from an objective perspective.

The Amon with a piece of bread in hand suddenly stopped moving and looked out the window.

Light shined in through the glass.

Two straight lines of light shined directly on him. They were a car's headlights.

Given how quickly the circles of light in the window grew larger, the approaching car had to be moving at a decent clip. Soon , the window was filled with white.

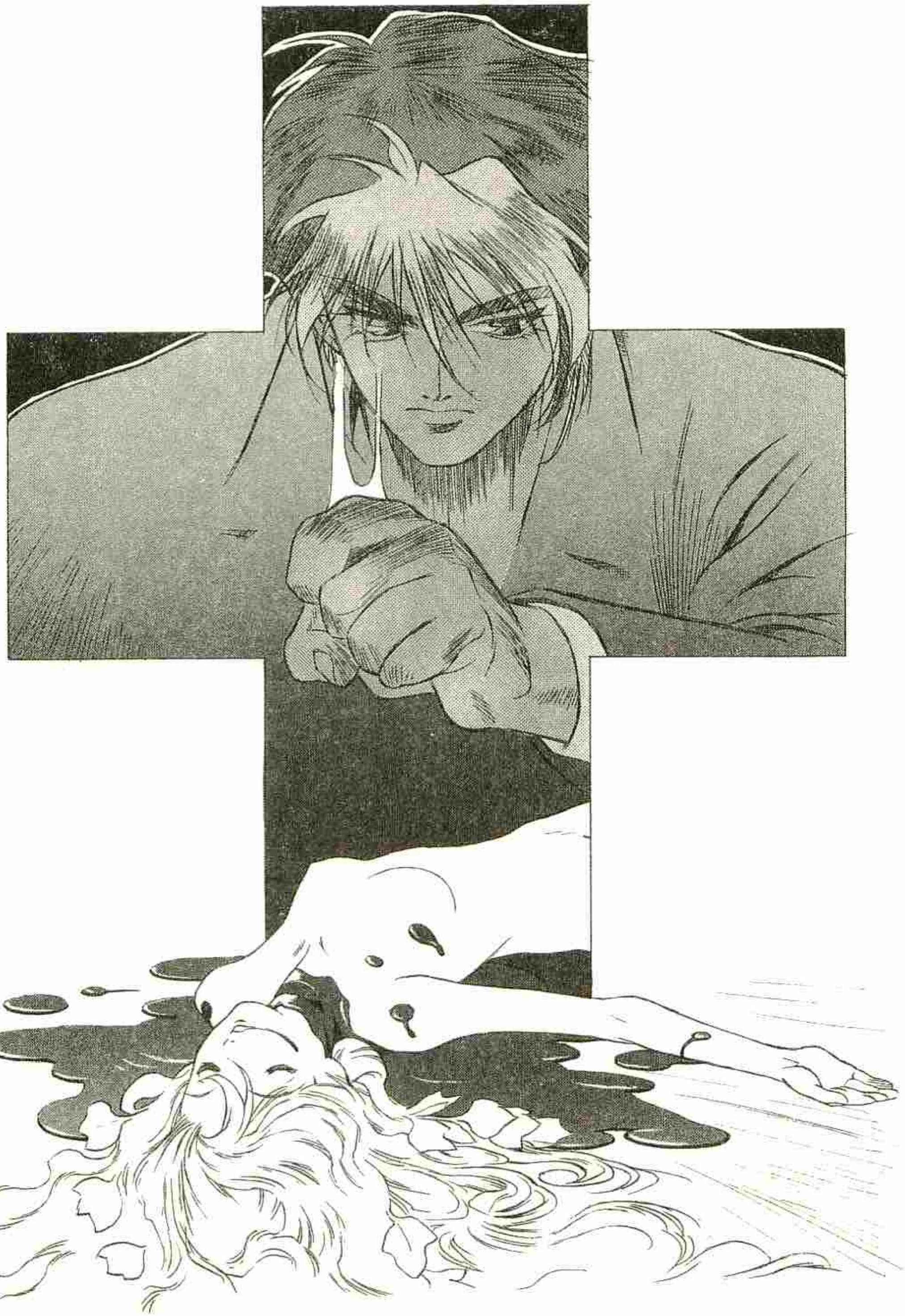
Amon was not all that tense. He was used to this, so he simply rose from the chair in preparation.

At the same time, the light vanished from the window. The car must have made a sharp curve in front of the apartment.

"?"

As soon as he relaxed slightly, a smashing sound rang out.

Something broke through the window and the outside air rushed in with it.



"What?!"

A human form bounced off the table and rolled down at his feet .

It was a woman.

The beautiful woman had long black hair. The tree roots indicating she was a dryad started on the back of her neck, extended down with her hair, and wrapped around her naked body.

That body was stained red.

The crimson dye wetting her body gushed from the horizontal gash in her neck.

The Amon in the dream and the Amon who was only a mind cried out in unison.

"Eilen!"

There was no strength in the eyes of the dryad woman.

However, her lips were still moving. They trembled as she tried to express something.

The dream Amon crouched down to hear what she had to say. He tried to pick her up even if it would dirty his clothes.

But the instant he grabbed her slender shoulders and wrapped his arms around her, the dryad named Eilen turned pure white as she Ashed.

It burned Amon a little as he was wet with her blood. Her disappearance scorched his clothes and skin, but he did seem to notice the pain as he gathered strength in his arms and embraced the air so as not to miss her disappearance as she turned to ash.

His lips repeated the same word over and over again as if it were a magic spell. The Amon having the dream could not hear the word, but he knew all too well what it was.

"Sorry."

That was what he was saying.

His mind turned away as if to avoid that word. He turned from the floor and looked ahead.

He saw something that should not have been there.

Several severed heads were peering inside the room through the broken window.

He recognized all of them. His mother's face was there, as was Eilen's even though she had only just Ashed. There was cheerful George, Dixon the knife-thrower, cowardly Rat, Garland, Purcell, Yukimaru, Freesia, Layla, and several others. And at the very center was a new face.

It was Jonathan's face.

They were all people around Amon who had died…no, been killed. They filled the window and gave him accusing stares.

"We were killed because we were with you, Death Wish Amon. If was all because of you."

He could swear he heard them cursing him like that. The pressure of guilt was Overridden on the dream and it threatened to crush his mind.

Jonathan opened his mouth.

"Go rush toward revenge in search of a place to die like you used to. Not that *you* will die. …You alone will live on and someone else will die in your place."

A single piece of parchment fell in front of Amon. It should not have been there either. It was the demon contract Jonathan had left behind.

"Of course, even with something like this, a failure like you could never make a contract."

Amon bit his lip in silence, but the accusations of the dead did not stop.

"Amon, if it wasn't for you, we wouldn't have died."

"Even if you remain wingless and refuse to use your demonic power, your sins will never vanish."

"After all, you should not even exist."

"Now, go out in search of a place to die like always."

"Don't you want to become one of us, Death Wish Amon?"

He lowered his gaze. Everything they were saying was true.

He knew that for sure after seeing this dream so many times in the past.

A groaning voice escaped his lips.

"That's right. All of you want me to die, don't you?"

But as soon as he asked that…

"That isn't true."

He heard a somewhat familiar voice.

He looked in shock at what he held in his arms.

No, *who* he held in his arms.

"Eilen?"

He let his guard down just once and called the dead girl's name.

But the girl in his arms did not turn around.

"It's okay," said whoever it was. "It's okay."

…Who is this?

He gently lifted the person in his arms, looked at her face, and found the identity of the girl who had suddenly appeared in this familiar nightmare.

Part 4

Amon opened his eyes and saw an unfamiliar ceiling. The feel of the bed and the afternoon light from the window were different as well. The hourly bell and music in the distance also sounded off.

"It's three already? That was a long nightmare."

Only then did he recall that this was the apartment Fir had prepared for him. It was smaller than his former home, but it was quieter. He knew the area because he had delivered beer here a few times.

He was currently in the living room that doubled as a bedroom.

He yawned twice.

…I need to deal with the luggage I brought in last night.

Still lying in bed, he Overrode his surroundings to check on the luggage on the floor.

A lot of luggage had been scattered around the bed, but…

"Where is it?"

He found no luggage whatsoever.

Not only that, but the floor had been dusty enough to leave footprints, but it was surprisingly clean now.

…What is going on?

That was when an odd weight was Overridden on his chest. It was a living weight with a warm softness to it.

"!?"

He had not expected anything to be lying on top of him, so he did a more thorough Override to see what was there.

"A girl?"

Just as he had held Eilen in his dream, he held a girl in his arms.

She wore somewhat professional attire and slept defenselessly in his arms. Her slender body rose and fell as she breathed and the soft-looking blonde hair on her shoulders shook.

She slept with a somehow happy look on her face.

…She was the one who was good at cooking, right? I met her at the Yard. Her name was…

At that point, he came back to his senses.

"Wh-what the hell are you doing!?"

He shouted out and sprang up with Klausl still in his arms. Either the movement or his voice elicited a quiet voice from her.

"…Nn?"

Sensing her waking up in his arms, Amon panicked. He did not know what was going on, but he had a feeling the current situation would not work in his favor.

He got back down into the bed and let go of her. She was still half asleep and started to fall over, so he supported her with one arm and checked on her clothing.

At the very least, it did not look like anything had happened while he slept.

After confirming that, he finally took a sigh of relief.

"Oh, good morning, Amon."

Klausl greeted him so readily that he just about collapsed. Once he endured that, he half-glared back at her.

When he saw her somewhat blank expression, he remembered a number of things.

For example, how she had multiplied that morning.

"W-wait just a second. Explain this!"

"Eh? Explain what?"

"Why are you here!?"

"You fell asleep in front of the brewery, so everyone carried you here."

"I did not fall asleep. I passed out after I was hit by a car!"

After insisting on something that pathetic, he came back to his senses.

"What is going on!? For one thing, why were you sleeping in my bed?"

"I came to help you move in this morning. You seemed tired, so I let you continue sleeping. And after a while, you started having a nightmare."

…*Again?*

Klausl nodded at the word he accidentally left Open.

"Yes, I was worried because you were speaking in your sleep and seemed to be suffering. And when I moved up next to you…"

"Yes?"

"You suddenly embraced me."

"What? Eh? W-wait."

"It was the first time a guy had done that to me, so I wasn't able to stop you."

She brought her hand to her cheek, but she was not blushing.

Amon could not help but think she was making fun of him, so he bared his teeth.

"O-okay, stop saying things that will give people the wrong idea! I already know nothing happened!"

"You're right. You fell asleep right after embracing me. You looked so peaceful then."

She gave an innocent smile and Amon paled.

But she ignored that and looked out the window.

"Oh, it's so late already. What would you like to eat, Amon?"

He just about answered but came back to his senses. When he realized he was getting dragged along at her pace, he cleared his throat and took back control of the conversation.

"I have more questions."

"Questions?"

"Why are you here and how did you get in?"

She responded to his harsh questions by pulling a key from a hidden pocket in her skirt. It dimly glittered in the light and seemed to have been only just made.

"I received a copy of the key with my orders this morning."

"W-wait just a minute! What are you talking about!?"

"I am your observer."

She casually said something unbelievable.

Amon's mouth hung open for a bit before he shouted back.

"What the hell!?"

"When one party wants to monitor the actions of a second party , they will have a third party remain nearby the second party on their behalf."

"Goddammit! Fir tricked me…"

"No, this has nothing to do with her. The order came directly from the Inspector."

Amon ground his teeth as he sat on the bed. He was acting entirely differently from normal, but he did not notice.

"So that Inspector put you up to this, did he? Well I don't need an observer, so get lost!"

"No."

Klausl changed her expression for once and she continued before Amon could say anything.

"You are in pain after your friend passed away, so you cannot be left alone. I will not allow it."

"Y-you idiot. Don't act like you understand this. I said get lost."

"No."

"I'll throw you out."

"Through the window? And even if you do, I'll come back."

She was clearly serious and Amon fell silent, so she continued as if to admonish him.

"No matter what you say or do, I will stay by your side."

"You really are stupid, aren't you? Don't you know everyone by my side ends up dead?"

The look he saw flash across her face made him gulp.

It was not a look of sympathy, sadness, or pity, but it was an expression only seen on those who knew.

But the look was soon replaced by a slight smile.

"I cannot leave. If I did, I would not fulfill my role as observer. Also, the Inspector left me with something. He said everything would work out if I gave it to you."

"Wh-what is it?"

Due to her previous expression, Amon was a bit taken aback.

She Overrode an item wrapped in paper and handed it to him.

Something like a paperback book was inside the wrapping. It did not seem to be one of the tabloids or other papers sold along the street.

…What is it?

He slowly opened the seal and pulled out the object inside.

"It is this month's issue of a men's magazine. It seems they secretly sell these to young men."

Klausl did not blush and her eyes remained closed, but she sounded troubled as she answered. Amon said nothing and slowly put the magazine back in its wrapping.

Meanwhile, Klausl continued getting worked up on her own.

"According to the Inspector, 'this'll win over any young guy like him. Eh heh heh.' …Ah! How could I say something like that? "

"…"

"But Amon, this kind of thing is…um…well…"

He continued staring at her in silence as she brought a hand to her cheek.

"It's lewd."

He more or less exploded.

Part 5

As it grew dark outside, artificial light filled the Savoy Hotel. That pure white electric light was not like moonlight and did not flicker like flames.

Humans were the only beings that suited that light.

That white light filled the hotel's first floor lobby from every direction and someone stood on the stairs continuing up from that lobby.

It was Moyla.

From halfway up the stairs, she looked around and Overrode the lobby. She checked past the towering marble columns and made sure there was no one at the front desk or the entrance by the windows.

"Where is he?" she muttered.

Her shawl-covered shoulders lowered and she began to cough. It was an unpleasant cough. The intermittent sounds seemed to come from the very depths of her body.

"Kh…"

She leaned against the stairway railing to endure it.

It took her several minutes to catch her breath.

…Is this due to London's air or is it getting worse?

She looked down at the hand she had used to hide her coughing and saw red speckles on the palm.

She wrinkled her brow a bit and stood up.

"Are you okay, Moyla?"

She looked toward the voice and found a young man in a minister's outfit standing in the center of the lobby. It was Ralf.

He held an umbrella instead of a gun.

"Yeah, an umbrella is useless against this fog. I'd love a waterproof coat from Burberry right about now."

He almost seemed to be talking to himself, but he made sure Moyla could hear.

"This country is a lot of trouble. But I had some time, so I got three more voices."

"How is your gun doing?"

"Pretty well. …More importantly, I heard you coughing just now. Are you okay?"

"Eh? Yes, I'm fine."

She clenched both her hands as she answered. She crossed her arms below her shawl to hide the blood in her clenched hand and she descended the stairs.

She moved out from behind the marble columns and into the entranceway where Ralf was already sitting on a sofa. She smiled bitterly when she saw him taking up an entire three-person sofa by himself. She sat in the opposite sofa.

"Ralf, um…"

He reflexively responded to her voice.

"I won't tell you were Valeath is if that's what you want. You'd go after him if I told you, wouldn't you?"

"It is my job to protect him."

He quickly removed his sunglasses when he heard that and he looked directly at her with his narrow eyes.

"Then that speeds things up. He isn't out there to fight. He just wanted to see the young man who was apparently adopted by that Hard Wolf. I found out about him yesterday."

"A family member of that Hard Wolf?"

"Something like that. He's apparently a demon, so normally a minister like me would handle him, but…there was something peculiar about this one."

"Something…peculiar?"

She was taken in by his conversation and he gave an embarrassed smile when he noticed.

"Sorry. I kind of dragged you away from the main point, didn't I?"

"I have nothing to do but wait around here anyway."

He crossed his arms and unabashedly Opened his thought about her being a smart young woman.

Her white cheeks flushed a little, but she kept her thoughts Closed.

"Could we get back to the conversation?" she asked.

"Sure. Some of it will be a little hard to say, but I'm just going to get it out there."

The smile vanished from his face and he checked to make sure no one else was around.

"You know why I'm working as a Hound, right?"

"Yes. You said before it was revenge for the villagers you were supposed to protect."

"That's right. No matter how strong my faith was, god didn't save them, so-…"

Moyla stopped him there.

"You don't need to say any more. …It would only be painful for you."

"Yeah, and it's nothing I can exactly brag about. …Now, as for Valeath's past…"

He hesitated.

"Maybe you'll understand if I mention a certain incident. The Borderson family has long protected an area in southern Germany surrounded by the Black Forest."

The look in Moyla's eyes changed when she heard the name Borderson. She was now staring intently at Ralf's expression as if trying to see through it.

But he did not mind.

"Reichle Borderson was a Hound and the young leader of the Busters there, but there was a demon attack on the day of his wedding. The demon had transformed into a human and masqueraded as his friend."

"…"

"It's said the demon killed his bride Melda and devoured the souls of all the people living in that land."

"But Reichle Borderson defeated that demon."

"Yes, I've heard he defeated it with the assistance of a servant girl who had managed to escape. And when he defeated the demon, he let its blood wash over him to gain a spell known as an Over Contract."

He gave a weary sigh.

"A few years later, a swordsman named Rickland Valeath appeared in Germany accompanied by a witch named Moyla Telmetz."

Ralf stared back into Moyla's eyes.

She said nothing and kept everything Closed.

"Yes," he nodded on his own. "People who have lost something important to them, something they should have protected, or – I'm a little embarrassed to say it – someone they loved, all have a similar feel to them."

"What about it?"

Moyla tilted her head and Ralf gave a clear answer.

"The young demon I saw yesterday felt a lot like Valeath."

"…!"

Moyla trembled at that.

"What…do you mean by that!?"

"I'm not entirely sure."

Ralf tilted his own head and asked a question of his own.

"But what would you do if you found someone with all the same traits as you?"

"Eh?"

"What if someone like that was standing right in front of you? Do you know what you would do?"

"…"

She fell silent, but he leaned forward and gave his answer.

"I don't think I would be able to stand it."

They were sharp words and they Overrode what kind of human he was.

But she did not respond. She did not agree or disagree.

After a glance into her eyes, Ralf sighed and fixed his posture.

"If it were me, I'd tell that other me that they could never surpass me."

But…

"What will Valeath do?"

Part 6

As the city filled the darkness with light, Amon went to get some dinner at a familiar pub called the Guinea. The Guinea was located near Bond Street which was filled with shops old even for London and the Guinea itself had been running since the fifteenth century.

It had no seats and everyone ate and drank while standing at the counter or the tall tables. That was the standard for the good old pubs. The counter and tables were almost entirely full and the customers showed little sign of moving.

However, no one stood on either side of Amon. Everyone else was chatting amongst themselves, but he was alone. He switched between eating his crisps and sandwich in silence.

Despite any thoughts he might have about Amon, the stone demon bartender approached him. He must have reached a break in the number of customers because he stopped in front of Amon and Overrode a mug in one of his six arms.

"This one's for Jonathan. He helped me out a lot."

He held out the dark stout beer.

Amon looked at it and pulled a ten pence coin from his jacket.

When the stone demon saw the coin on the counter, he stopped the hand setting down the mug.

"Hey, I said this one's for Jonathan."

"And the money's *from* Jonathan," replied Amon as he grabbed a crisp.

With an exasperated look, the stone demon set the mug on the counter next to Amon as if someone was standing there.

"It's been two years since you came here, but you haven't changed at all."

"The pub hasn't changed either."

"I lowered the price of lagers to ten pence since the ladies are drinking too these days. But…what has you here? I know there's some big case in London, so are you out looking for the murderer? "

Amon did not answer. The girl with the closed eyes appeared in the back of his mind, but he quickly erased that image.

However, the bartender seemed to have noticed.

"Is it a girl?"

"No, it's not. More like a high-pressure salesman. More importantly, give me some Cheshire cheese. The hard stuff."

"Sorry, but the hard kind isn't very popular these days. I'm all out. …So what kind of girl is she?"

"You sure are persistent."

"Of course I am. You haven't been interested in a girl since Eilen, right?"

The look in Amon's eyes changed when he heard that name.

"Don't speak that name in front of me."

The bartender fell silent. This must have happened in the past because he comfortably turned his back on Amon and walked over to a different customer.

Amon sighed and grabbed another crisp. He realized he should have ordered some Leicester if they were out of Cheshire, so he prepared to call the bartender over again.

But then he found a man standing to his left where Jonathan's mug had been set.

The man had a sharp aura about him.

His blond hair was tied back behind his neck, he wore a long dark green coat that seemed to absorb the surrounding light, and his presence gave one goose bumps even when he only stood there .

The aura surrounding him had distanced the nearby customers. They had likely subconsciously moved away while they chatted.

Amon grabbed his sandwich while brushing aside the man's presence.

"…"

The man silently placed a hand on the counter. At some point, he had Overridden a glass in that hand.

The scent that reached Amon's nose told him the glass contained Glenmorangie malt whisky. The man seemed to be drinking it without diluting it.

"What do you want?"

Amon spoke only loud enough for the man to hear.

The answer could not have been simpler.

"For you to die."

A brief silence fell, but after a few seconds…

"Why?"

Amon turned his focus toward the man as he asked.

In that instant, he found Jonathan's mug in front of him for some reason.

The man who had stood on his left now stood on his right. The sandwich and crisps Amon had ordered were in front of the man.

Amon and the man.

Their positions had swapped to that order.

"…?"

Amon had no clue what had happened and the man asked him a question.

"Do you understand?"

At that moment, the two of them swapped positions again.

Just like before, the sandwich and crisps sat in front of Amon and Jonathan's mug sat in front of the man to his left.

The man and Amon.

That was their order now.

"I see," said Amon.

Then the man spoke.

"When identical words are placed side by side, their order can change without altering the meaning or form of the sentence."

"…"

"And no one needs two of the same word."

Silence fell.

After reflecting on that silence, Amon spoke without looking at the man.

"Are you the one who killed Jonathan and so many others?"

"If I answered that, you would have to die here."

Amon said nothing and the man took a drink of his Glenmorangie.

"If it comes to that, I would take care of everyone else here in the first ten seconds."

"And only then would you focus on me? You're giving yourself a pretty big handicap there."

"A handicap? It would only last ten seconds and I would only have to slay the monsters here. I would not be injured or even tired afterwards."

When the man called the people in the pub "monsters", Amon realized what he was.

"I see. So that's why so many people have been dying in this city."

"What will you do?"

He was asking if Amon would fight here.

Amon hesitated for just a moment, but after comparing his strength to the man next to him, he sighed. He fully Closed his thoughts so his mind could not be read and he shook his head.

"Fighting here isn't the best plan. How about tomorrow?"

"Fine. And you can bring help if you want."

"I wouldn't do that. …Oh, I know. Come to St. James's Park tomorrow evening."

Only after saying that did he look at the man's face for the first time.

The man similarly looked down on Amon.

In that instant, their gazes audibly clashed.

The same light filled the man's blue eyes and Amon's golden eyes.

"…!"

Amon frantically applied Verbal Self Control and Overrode his own body for good measure.

He felt he would otherwise trigger a Balance Fall where his writing fell out of balance. He had a feeling he would be sucked into the man's eyes if he was not careful.

"So we are not exactly alike," muttered the man as he brought a hand to his chest.

Amon saw a pendant hanging there. It was a beautiful women's pendant that did not suit the man at all.

He seemed to toy with it in his hand and he asked a single sharp question.

"Can you defeat me?"

Amon did not respond.

He had a past. It was an unimaginable past which had led him to fight as he sought a place to die.

But what about this man before his eyes?

The man asked the same question again.

"Can you defeat me?"

Amon was reminded of a scene from his nightmares. In that nightmare, what did the people peering in through the apartment window want from him?

"…"

Suddenly, a smile so fearless that it looked forced appeared on Amon's face

He gave his answer immediately afterwards.

"I'll defeat you."

The man nodded at that and began to turn his back on Amon.

But he stopped and his blue eyes turned to the mug on the counter.

"…"

He pulled a cigarette box from his coat pocket and pulled a cigarette from it. He held it between his fingers and lit it without placing it in his mouth.

As he watched the smoke rise from the cigarette, Amon pushed the counter's ashtray over to Jonathan's spot next to the mug.

As if answering Amon, the man placed the cigarette in the ashtray with the filter end pointed the other way.

He was clearly implying that someone else was there.

The two exchanged a glance and they both gave a small nod.

But then they were interrupted.

"Amon!"

He reflexively turned toward a voice he had heard countless times that day.

He found Klausl standing there, but unlike before, she was frowning and puffing out her cheeks. She seemed upset.

He glanced toward the man standing next to him. The man was staring expressionlessly at Klausl. He did not seem to have any thoughts about her sudden appearance, but that could not be the

case. The atmosphere created by the two of them had led everyone else to subconsciously avoid them and yet this girl had completely ignored that and called out to Amon.

"Why did you leave without telling me? I had prepared dinner and everything."

Klausl walked over and her casual movements left Amon speechless. Even if she was blind, she should have been able to sense the general atmosphere.

"…"

The man took a step toward her and left no opening in his movements.

Seeing that, Amon realized what he was trying to do.

…You idiot!

Amon Opened a comment that could have been directed at Klausl or the man. At the same time, he tensed his body and prepared for what happened next.

However…

"Good evening. Are you a friend of Amon's?"

Her words seemed far too out of place as they left her mouth and struck the man.

He did not respond, but the hand reaching for his coat pocket stopped.

"If not, I'm sorry. But you felt a lot like him." She smiled at the man. "But don't become exactly like him. That would be a lot of trouble."

The man let his arms hang at his sides when he heard that. He was showing Amon he had no intention of attacking and then he walked around Klausl.

His footsteps were low and quiet and they grew more distant.

At the same time, sound returned to the pub.

The movements and voices of the other customers had seemed to stop at some point, but they surrounded Amon with noise once more.

He let the atmosphere of a normal pub wash over him and he gave a sigh of relief.

"So it worked out in the end. I can't take much more of this."

"Don't say that."

Klausl had reached his side at some point and she pinched his arm.

"Ow! What is wrong with you!?"

He glared at her and found her frowning at him.

"Why did you leave without telling me? I've been looking for you."

"Oh, c'mon. Why do I have to eat the food my observer makes? Am I a prisoner or something?"

"This is my job. …Well, making your food isn't, but observing you is."

"Hey, Amon. Is this the girl you Opened about?"

Amon ignored the bartender who looked over his shoulder from the other side of the counter. Amon was not the type to get involved with that kind of thing.

However…

"What's this, Amon? Were you spreading rumors about me?"

"How did you reach that conclusion?"

He clicked his tongue.

"Besides, I wouldn't be eating here if you weren't in my room."

"Oh? Young lady, are you sharing a room with Amon?"

Before Amon could realize he might very well have dug his own grave here, Klausl answered.

"Yes. This morning, he suddenly embra-…"

"Dah! I told you not to say anything that would give people the wrong idea!"

After cutting her off, he realized the bartender was giving him a surprised look.

"Wh-what?'

"Amon… You've changed."

"That's not what you said earlier."

He almost seemed to be sulking when he said that and he brought one of the remaining crisps to his mouth. The potato tasted bland to him, so he spoke to Klausl without turning her way .

"Hey, go get the salt from over there."

"Oh, the salt? Sure."

She reached out and hesitated between the different bottles of spices. She really was blind, but after feeling around, she found the right one.

After watching her, the bartender spoke to Amon.

"Hey, she's blind, isn't she? Try to have some tact."

Amon did not respond. He casually took the small salt container and spoke to Klausl.

"Does it make you happy when people are extra careful around you?"

She did not answer, but she had a somehow relieved look on her face. It was not her usual smile. It was a relaxed and unguarded expression.

"…"

Unsure where to look, Amon averted his gaze.

She had either noticed his embarrassment or wanted to smooth things over because she asked the bartender a question.

"Bartender, can I order an Irish coffee and some Stilton?"

"Y-yes. If you have 22 pence."

The bartender moved away and she pulled a wallet from a hidden pocket in her skirt.

Amon spoke as he sprinkled salt on his crisps.

"Alcoholic coffee and blue cheese? You drink a lot, don't you?"

"Care for an evening drink? It will help you sleep."

"No, thanks."

"You two get along well. Here's your order, young lady."

The bartender set down the order as if to say "take your time" and Klausl picked up the glass of coffee.

Amon reached for the cheese, but she slapped his hand.

"Ow! You're pretty damn stingy."

"You can't touch that."

She picked up the plate of Stilton and placed it on the counter next to Amon as if offering it to someone.

It was right next to the mug and ashtray.

"This is what I ordered it for. I don't know who this is for, but they looked sad without anything to eat."

Amon stared at her as she gave her cheerful explanation and returned to her part of the counter.

…*What a strange person.*

She smiled at his blatantly Opened thought.

"You are strange too, Amon."

Chapter 3: Dark Respite

Part 1

For once, the sky was actually clear.

That may have been because it was Sunday. There was no smoke from the factories and the sky was surprisingly empty. The chapter title page leading to heaven would be beyond that sky.

Of course, that was invisible. It did have a physical form, but the door leading to heaven was naturally as transparent as the sky.

If the nine chapter title pages were visible, the sunlight would not reach London even on a clear day. Monsters loved the night, but that did not mean they loved the darkness. Some of them enjoyed napping in the park on a sunny day.

The area in front of Westminster Cathedral was the same, but it was not the best place for napping with the bell and music playing every hour. Still, there were other things one could do in the sun.

An open area of grass was located in front of that cathedral with its tall red brick tower and a bazaar was customarily held there on weekends. It pulled in a fair number of mostly local customers.

Some people sold used items laid out on sheets and others sold vegetables from the outskirts of the city laid out on the lawn. Only the bigger merchants selling their inventory had stands set up.

Goods were being sold all over the area and the customers gathered around or lined up.

Among them, a single non-monster shopped undetected.

It was Moyla.

…Why am I doing this when I'm supposed to be inspecting the area for our mission?

But once the warm sun had washed over her, she had been drawn in. Not long after that, she had found herself picking up or looking at the various goods and she was now carrying around some things she had actually bought.

"My old habits are coming out."

She left the crowds and checked on her purchases near the cathedral's entrance. She had bought some plates, a comb, and other items. If she managed to return to her country, she would likely end up using them.

Long ago, she had worked as a maid and shopping like this had been her favorite part of the job. At the time, she had assumed that life would continue forever.

"I would ride the carriage to the market in town with Lady Melda and..."

She hesitated on the next name, shook her head, and corrected herself.

"All of them are gone now. Lady Melda is gone, Master Reichle is gone, and so is Ellis the maid who was like their little sister."

She sat on the edge of a raised flower bed in front of the cathedral and she sighed.

"Now only Master Valeath the Swordsman and Moyla the Witch remain. …That's all there is."

She suddenly remembered the woman's pendant hanging from Valeath's neck.

"Lady Melda."

She placed a hand on her forehead and spoke as if questioning herself.

"Why did you leave Master Reichle to me in the end?"

She hung her head and closed her eyes.

…If it hadn't been for that…

She fell silent and Closed her thoughts. She closed off her entire being.

And she applied Verbal Self Control.

After a while, she gave a deep sigh.

…I made a promise to wait no matter how long it took.

She nodded, opened her eyes, and found a girl standing in front of her.

The girl had soft-looking blonde hair and she spoke to Moyla with her eyes closed.

"Um, are you okay? You don' seem to be in a bad mood."

Part 2

Amon was inside Westminster Cathedral's large main sanctuary located past a corridor. He was alone, drinking some coffee sold at the bazaar.

There was a giant square hole past the railing he rested his elbows on. Each side was fifteen meters long and there was no sign of the bottom. Someone who could see through the darkness would have seen the cathedral's famous steam-powered automatic pipe organ located far, far below the ground.

Needless to say, Amon could not see in the dark. He was looking at the two giant chains that rose straight up from the darkness below.

The links of the chain were large enough for him to duck through and they led to the bell tower directly connected to the sanctuary's ceiling.

The large bell was visible up above. The support and the head of the hammer used to strike the bell were both as tall as Amon.

The chains were connected to the back end of the hammer, so it seemed pulling on the chains caused the hammer to strike the bell. This was how the city's hourly bell and pipe organ music worked.

…Come to think of it, I've never taken a good look at this before.

As soon as he thought that, the ropes formed from metal loops moved up and down. One moved up and the other down. The movement of the chains caused the hammer to strike the bell.

The bell immediately produced a low, deep, and yet clear tone. The entire sanctuary resonated with the sound and shook a little.

The very next moment, a wave of sound much like a physical blow erupted from the hole in front of Amon. Not only did the deluge of sound pass through his body, but it almost Overrode his body. The pipe organ music reverberated through the deep hole and transformed into a much greater sound than it had started as.

The paper coffee cup in his hand was overwhelmed by the sound. The vibrations crushed it. No, the great presence of the sound was too much for it and triggered a Balance Fall.

Amon grabbed onto the railing with both hands. He focused on gathering his strength and used that as a basis for his Verbal Self Control. He somehow managed to withstand the noise and avoid a Balance Fall of his own.

"Now that was something."

By the time he muttered to himself, he could hear all the other sounds.

Half hidden by the pipe organ's music, he heard a metallic sound like grinding gears. He guessed it was the steam devices that let the organ play automatically.

Rumor had it they were just as large as the chains. Someone had once jumped into the hole to commit suicide, their bones had jammed the gears of the steam devices, and the music had stopped . Of course, that did not happen now. The bell stopped after ringing thrice and the music finished nicely with an especially loud note.

"Three o'clock, huh?"

Amon rested his elbows on the railing as the lingering sound shook his body.

"That was three o'clock too, wasn't it?"

He suddenly remembered what had happened that morning.

It had been three in the morning which could still be called the middle of the night.

He had woken to hear the bell and music coming from Westminster Cathedral, but that was not what had woken him.

A dream had.

He had not had his usual nightmares.

He had fallen into a strangely calm sleep, but it had been so unusual that he had uncomfortably woken.

…That's just pathetic.

He had woken to that thought.

It had been dark, but enough light entered through the window to see across the room.

He had been sleeping on a three-person sofa. Before going to sleep, he and Klausl had argued over which one would sleep on the sofa and he had forced his way onto it.

"…?"

He had felt something like a pillow below his head, but he had not had one before going to sleep. Not to mention that the only pillow had been on the bed Klausl was using.

Nevertheless, he had felt it below his head. It had been a soft, warm sensation.

He had suddenly realized the sensation was somehow familiar.

He had frantically Overridden his surroundings and the dimly-lit room had grown clearer than before.

"Not again."

Klausl had been sleeping by his head with a blanket pulled up to her shoulders. The pillow-like feeling had been her thigh.

"You idiot."

He had started to get up and warn her, but he had stopped.

He had stopped because he had known what she would say when he asked why she had done it.

"Because you were having a nightmare again and I didn't know what to do."

He had been certain she would say that with a serious look on her face. That was just the king of selfish and yet worrying girl she was.

Even after hearing he was Death Wish Amon, she did not fear him in the slightest and she would show any number of closed-eyed expressions whenever something happened. And she did it all seriously instead of out of pity.

…Does she trust me?

"If I said that, she'd take it the wrong way and get carried away."

He had muttered that so he could hear and rested his head on Klausl's lap.

Suddenly, his head had hit something hard.

…?

It had been on the side of her hip, so he had guessed it was something in her skirt's hidden pocket.

"What is that?"

Fully aware he probably should not have done so, he had touched whatever it was through the cloth. That had told him its general shape and that was enough to know what it was.

…A hand mirror.

He had looked up at her face in surprise.

Her blonde hair had fallen across her closed eyes as she slept, but those eyes would not open even when she woke.

…Why doesn't she open her eyes?

He had also asked another question he had not considered before.

…What is she?

She almost looked human, but that could not be the case. No human could move about normally without opening her eyes. However, she was not a demon or a divine race, she did not have the thin shadow of a spirit, and she did not vanish below the sun like a ghost.

Given her multiplication the previous day, he had wondered if she was a relative of an amoeba or a slime.

…I just don't know.

As soon as he had reached that conclusion, she had frowned slightly and let out a small breath that was half a sigh and half a groan.

He had quickly begun to feign sleep, but she had spoken before he could.

It had been a very, very quiet voice that only he could hear.

"Sister… Why?"

Hearing that, he had stopped pretending to sleep. He had simply stared at her face.

Whatever dream she was having, she had been lightly biting her lower lip.

"…"

Amon had said nothing, but after seeing her slender hand stick out from the blanket, he had reached out his own hand.

He had held her slightly tensed hand.

Her expression had changed a little. The strength had left her lower lip and her eyebrows had grown more peaceful.

Amon had sighed.

…This is to repay her.

Satisfied with that reasoning, he had closed his eyes.

When he had woken the following morning, she had already left the sofa and he had heard someone preparing breakfast in the kitchen beyond the living room door.

He recalled all of that while resting his elbows on the railing.

"I must have been half asleep to do that."

Suddenly, he opened his right hand and looked at it.

"But still…"

His hand was hardened from all the fights he got into, but he could still feel her slender hand in it. He still felt the strength and warmth of her hand as she tensed up in fear of her dream.

He remembered that, but what about her?

Part 3

As Moyla sat on the edge of the flower bed and spoke with Klausl, she was not her usual self. Ralf would have said she looked happy and Valeath would have said her expression had changed slightly.

She was smiling.

Meanwhile, Klausl looked sulky.

"It really is tough. Why don't guys see a problem with a messy room?"

"What we call dirty, they think is actually pretty clean."

"Yes, that's exactly what I'm talking about. …Miss Moyla, do you have experience as a maid or something?"

"I do and I'm working a similar job now. What about you?"

"What I'm doing is similar too."

"It is tough, isn't it? And from what you're saying, you must be serving a ridiculous person."

"I don't mind. It isn't a job, after all."

"Eh?"

Moyla's smile vanished at the words "it isn't a job". She hesitated before finally choosing her words carefully and asking a question.

"Then why are you with that person?"

Klausl seemed to focus on Moyla's nearly Opened thoughts more than the question itself because she suppressed a smile and nodded.

"I would not say I am serving him. Is that not the case for you, Miss Moyla?"

"…"

Moyla was speechless and Klausl lightly stretched as she continued.

"A long time ago, my sister taught me that I should never let myself be a 'thing'."

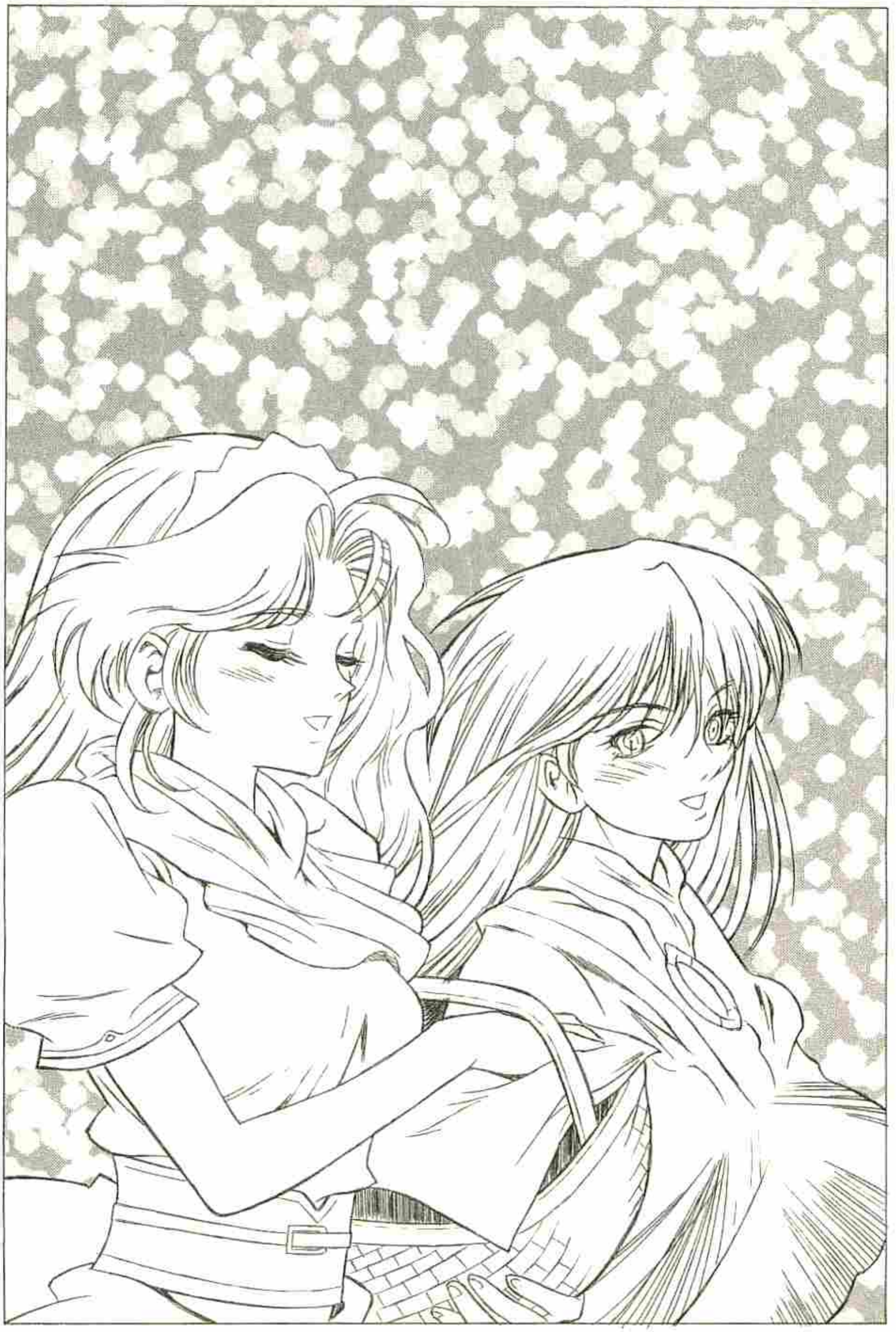
"…A thing?"

"We are very good at office work and housework. If we set our minds to it, we can keep working and working like a machine… like a 'thing'."

Moyla fell silent and that silence seemed to push the closed-eyed girl to speak further.

"If I lived like that, people would value me and praise me. That would be wonderful, but then what happens if someone comes along who can do the job even better than me? I can't even see, so I would probably be thrown out. …But when I think about that, I end up focusing even more on my work and becoming more and more like a machine."

She took a breath, changed her expression, and turned toward Moyla.



"But Amon is different! He's not the most sociable person, but he doesn't treat me any differently because I'm blind and he will actually have a conversation with me."

As she spoke, Klausl raised her right hand up near her face as if to show Moyla. She gently spread her nicely-shaped fingers and suddenly clenched them into a fist.

"He would get mad if he heard me say it, but he's actually a very nice person."

"And that's why you're with him?"

"Yes. The one unfortunate part is that he sometimes calls another woman's name in his sleep."

"That doesn't sound good. You have your work cut out for you. "

Seeing Klausl smile at that, Moyla nodded in her heart.

…*As do I.*

"Good. That means you have someone like that by your side, doesn't it?"

Moyla briefly panicked when the girl replied to her thought, but she soon realized what had happened.

"Oh, I Opened that."

Realizing she had let her guard down due to the carefree atmosphere, she smiled bitterly.

"Yes, the person by my side really is a very nice person…but sadly, he's forgotten that side of himself."

"Amon is a lot like that, too. But in his case, he's obsessed with tragedy."

"Obsessed?"

"He thinks everything is his fault and he always apologizes whenever something happens. And yet I'm not with him because I want to hear him apologize. …Right?"

"Y-yes."

Moyla agreed, but she was a little confused. She had never thought about someone being "obsessed with tragedy".

The past she shared with Valeath was indeed a tragedy.

…*But…*

She frantically Closed the thought that came to her and looked back to Klausl. The girl's eyes were still closed as she smiled calmly.

When she saw that smile, Moyla spoke without meaning to.

"I had thought we were a lot alike," she said quietly. "But I envy you."

"I envy you, Miss Moyla. If was as captivating as you, maybe Amon would be more willing to look my way."

Both of them laughed quietly.

But then they were interrupted.

"?"

Moyla sensed a presence behind her.

A very familiar and intense aura approached from the cathedral entrance to the right.

This was Valeath's presence.

She began to turn around but stopped.

Valeath was supposed to be spending the day in the warehouse by the hotel while he fine-tuned the machine they needed for their mission. The machine was the large piece of cargo Ralf had brought in with his weapons. From what Moyla had heard, the work on it would take all afternoon.

So why was he here?

Moyla's hesitation allowed Klausl to turn around first.

The blind girl spoke a name, but it was not "Valeath".

"Amon!"

Moyla alone knew that was an ominous name that would soon lead to a fight.

Chapter 4: Mistaken Blood

Part 1

On the second floor of Scotland Yard, the Inspector's office was under attack from another wave of paperwork. The walkway he had just barely managed to maintain the day before was completely gone today.

More cases seemed to have turned up.

The setting sun shined through the window and reflected off of the white paper filling the room. The room and the paper were dyed in crimson light.

"To think this is how I would get to enjoy the sunset again."

That annoyed comment came from Fir. She was lying on top of a pile of documents large enough to make a bed and inspecting the papers around her.

Suddenly, she threw away the documents in her hand and Overrode the newspaper that must have been around somewhere. An article covered one entire page and she read it aloud for someone to hear.

"In two days, a total of ninety-one people have died. Rumor says this is the return of Jack the Ripper, but the number of dead goes far beyond that. Some say they have heard occasional gunshots or other odd noises in the city and everyone is living in fear of this unseen murderer. Meanwhile, Scotland Yard has only

shown their incompetence by saying 'the investigation has only just begun, so no comment'."

She sighed.

"So you really are incompetent, Inspector."

"Don't just accept that."

The Inspector's voice came from the inside the largest pile of documents in the center of the room.

"I'm so busy dealing with this paperwork that I can't do any real investigation!"

"You're going through it all pretty quickly for you. But…I'm sure there will be more deaths tonight."

"Fir, it is all over if we back down."

She heard the sound of the man striking a pose inside the mountain of paper.

The mountain surrounding him shook unsteadily and suddenly collapsed inwards.

"Gwaaaah!"

Swallowing up his scream, the mountain collapsed into a hill.

"Honestly, what are you doing?"

Fir sighed, but the Inspector's arm grew from the paper hill and beckoned her over.

"Fir, dig me out real quick."

"If you want me to, then answer my question from earlier."

"You mean what kind of monster that young man is? Why do I need to make a judgment on his race?"

"Because you always get so serious when it comes to him." She sighed. "Or is it because you're gay?"

"Of course not!"

The hill sank further inwards, so the internal density of paperwork had to be quite high.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow. Fir, this is getting legitimately bad."

"Fine then. If you were a zombie, you'd be able to get out on your own when you're buried."

She casually stood, but the phone suddenly rang.

"?"

"Wait, Fir. Hurry up and get me out of here."

"Shut up."

With that quick comment, she used her excellent balance and agility to walk along the piles of papers and to the ringing phone.

The sound of the bell was muffled, so it had to be buried somewhere.

"Is it around here?"

Judging its general location, she stuck her hand into the sea of paper.

She found it on her first try. Her hand felt the phone's dial that vibrated as the bell rang.

"Wait just a second."

She only pulled out the receiver because anything else would have been too much work, but the cord was too short to reach her ear.

She solved that by lying on her stomach atop the paperwork.

"Hello, this is Room 13."

She tried to sound as cheerful as possible and a voice reached her ear. The voice and what it said covered her skin with goose bumps.

She directly Opened her first thought.

…Not good!

There was no way the Inspector had missed it.

"What is it, Fir!"

"Amon… That idiot's gone off somewhere!"

That was all she told him before pressing the receiver hard against her ear.

"Eh? On the way back from the bazaar, he said he'd forgotten to buy something? And a Miss Moyla disappeared too? U-um, Klau, try to calm down a little. You're at Westminster Cathedral right now, aren't you?"

"Has that young man vanished?"

"Yes! So be quiet!"

Fir gulped.

The Amon she knew had not been the type to lie.

So where had he gone after tricking the girl named Klausl? What was he hoping to do in this short time away from her observation?

A bad feeling sent Fir's pulse racing. She nodded several times with the receiver to her ear, but she suddenly frowned.

"After he left you, he went back to the bazaar? Why?"

She paused to listen.

"A bouquet of flowers?"

"What's this about flowers?"

"Shut up. Amon left Klau…and apparently he returned to the bazaar and bought a bouquet of flowers. But she doesn't know where he went after that."

The Amon that Fir knew was not the kind of guy who would decorate his home with flowers.

…*So why?*

She soon found the answer. It was something she knew quite well.

Amon had bought the bouquet on his way to a certain place.

…*St. James's Park!*

That park had a lake and a small forest and a change came over Fir's body as she prepared to say its name.

"No, wait! Don't get so worked up!"

Before the Inspector had finished his complaint, the air in the room rapidly converged.

The instantaneous gust of wind created a blizzard out of the piles of documents. At the same time, a large amount of fog appeared, wrapped around Fir, and gently exploded outward.

She had Altered.

"!"

With a gentle sound, the wind let up and the flying papers fell like scattered flower petals.

The papers accumulated like snow, but Fir had vanished from the top of the pile. Where had she gone? Only the uniform she had worn lay on its belly.

"Fir, you did it, didn't you?"

As if to answer the Inspector's question, the uniform lying on the sea of paper twitched slightly.

The edge of the uniform lifted up and a Siamese cat crawled out .

The cat sat in front of the phone receiver and mewed.

…Now, what do I do?

The cat's Opened thoughts had Fir's tone of voice.

This completely normal looking cat was Fir's Altered form.

"Having you Alter whenever you get too worked up is a real pain."

Fir turned toward the Inspector's voice. The man had somehow managed to sit up from the hill of paper and he pointed at the receiver sitting next to her.

"Klausl is calling for you."

…I know.

After Opening that, she used her paws to awkwardly grab the receiver.

She heard Klausl's voice from it, but Fir could not speak in this form. She could only express her thoughts through gestures and Open Words.

And unfortunately, neither of those worked over the phone.

…Inspector!

She turned the receiver so it faced the man.

He sighed at her urgent thought. His waist and below were still buried and he brought a hand to his chin in a pose of contemplation.

"Klausl, can you hear me? The young man you are after has likely gone to St. James's Park."

He then looked at Fir and Fir nodded.

After some hesitation, he continued.

"There is a memorial in the woods on the west side of the park. …Hurry there! We will head that way, too!"

Part 2

The perfectly clear night sky covered the heavens with some purple remaining to the west.

The moon filled the sky.

It was not a full moon. Some of the roundness was lacking.

The moonlight did not reach the city of London evenly. It fell weakly on the bright downtown area and strongly on the many nature parks.

St. James's Park was one such nature park. It was located east of Buckingham Palace, a large lake extended from east to west, and it was surrounded by woods.

It was a quiet park. The sun had only just set, so not much noise was reaching it from the city. During winter, the entrance closed at four, so there were no guests in the park.

Nothing moved and it gave off a faint pale light. That was the reflected moonlight. It almost looked like time had stopped there. With nothing to see it, the park did not move. It simply stayed still without Overriding itself.

Or so it should have been.

Everything should have been still and unchanging, but sudden motion entered the park. First, the trees of the woods trembled and shook their leaves.

Small waves covered the lake surface.

A slight wind blew through.

This wind did not carry a wind spirit. The air itself had moved as if called by something.

The wind danced at a gentle pace on its way to the western woods. It followed a stone-paved walking path through the woods and stopped halfway through.

At that point, the path widened.

A stone slab was installed near the curbstone. The stone had words carved into it.

"We pray for the peaceful afterlife of the following victims of the slaughter that occurred here."

A voice read the inscription.

At the same time, a bouquet of flowers was tossed on top of the moonlit stone.

It had been thrown by the wingless demon named Amon.

He called the names of those who had been killed here even though the inscribed names were covered by the bouquet.

He called forty-two names and took a breath.

"Sorry. I still haven't died."

His pale breath scattered.

"It's been two years, but it doesn't feel anywhere near that long. …The only survivors were Fir, me because I left the team, and two or three others."

His eyes turned toward the bouquet on the stone, but he was not looking at it.

A bitter smile appeared on his lips, but he quickly erased it.

"What do you think, Eilen? Why were you with me? Why did you decide to stay by my side? And…"

And?

"What were you trying to say when you died in my arms?"

He recalled another instant from his nightmares.

"My mother was the same. When she died in my place, why did she smile toward me? …Why?"

There was no one there to answer his question.

"…"

He bit his lower lip and looked away from the stone slab. He closed his eyes as if to say he did not want to see anything.

Suddenly, the wind struck his cheek. The bottom of his jacket waved about and his body swayed.

The leaves rustled as if the woods were jumping around. It sounded like waves or spraying water.

"!"

This was a powerful wind and it was so cold and sharp it felt like it was cutting into him.

This wind felt like it had actual mass and Amon knew what it was called: murderous intent.

He opened his eyes.

The bouquet on the stone slab had been blown away and the forty-two names were visible.

"Wait for me."

With that, he turned his back on the stone and faced the source of the murderous blowing wind.

He looked down the walking path and saw the moonlit stone pavement.

A man stood there.

His right hand held a sharp line of light that looked like it had been tempered in the moonlight. One glance was enough to know this was a quality sword.

The man was about five meters away, so he was not in combat range just yet.

The man was the first to name himself.

“Hound Rickland Valeath.”

He held the long sword in front of his face, split his own vision in two using the back of the blade, and stared at Amon.

“I swear on this sword I shall slay you.”

Part 3

Ralf was not comfortable in his luxurious room in the Savoy Hotel.

“Living in poverty is best for a minister.”

He had a sleeping bag set up on the small area of available floor . That was where he slept. The art deco and modestly luxurious room was going mostly unused.

He had his shotgun and rifle cartridges lined up on the room’s side table as he refilled the cartridges. The cartridges were

completely sealed, but for some reason, the powder inside had a way of getting damp.

"I can't believe this. There's just too much moisture in England. …If Moyla is back by the time I finish, I'll greet her and head out to get some work done."

As soon as he finished speaking his selfish plans aloud, a loud knock came to the room's door.

"!?"

He stroked the top of the side table with his hand and Overlossed everything so it appeared empty.

He also Overrode a few pound coins in his hand. If it was the bellboy here to make the bed, he could hand him some money and ask him to leave.

"If the expenses keep piling up, I won't even be able to buy any souvenirs."

Completely forgetting his previous complaint about not living in poverty, he stood to the side of the door with an annoyed look. His arms were still hanging to either side of his body.

"Who is it?"

"It's Moyla!"

"…Why?"

He asked a stupid question without thinking. This was the person he most wanted to visit him, but he was caught off guard because he had never expected it to actually happen.

He let his guard down and opened the door.

"Moyla?"

He called out and found Moyla standing in the hallway. She looked on the verge of tears, she was gasping for breath, and her shoulders were trembling, but she must have been relieved to see Ralf because her expression softened.

"Kh."

With a slight groan, she began to cough. She doubled over and expelled the air from her lungs as if in spasms.

"A-are you okay?"

He wrapped his arms around her and felt something slightly warmer than body temperature reach his hand.

It was blood.

"Moyla!?"

"I-I'm fine. This is normal."

Her shoulders rose and fell as she breathed and she removed the hand she held to her mouth. Her lips and palm were stained by slightly darkened blood.

"This is due to London's air. …I'll be better once I return home."

She almost seemed to be reassuring herself of that and she wiped her mouth with a hand. She then looked up at Ralf as he held her.

"Ralf, please. Please tell me where Master Valeath is!"

"!"

The words literally stabbed into Ralf.

He frowned a bit.

"Why are you asking me that?"

"I have a bad feeling! I happened across the young man you mentioned last night, but he was so much like Master Valeath… and even the girl by his side was similar!"

"Eh?"

Moyla grabbed at his chest and shouted at him.

"This will only lead to tragedy! Master Valeath is trying to kill himself! He is trying to destroy his own past and everything that happened!"

"…"

"Please! You're the only one I can rely on right now."

"Do you really think I'll tell you?"

Still holding Moyla in one arm, Ralf entered the room and closed the door.

He used his free arm to push the door closed.

He gathered strength in both arms as if to make sure no one could get in and no one could leave.

"That man has gone to kill the young man who resembles him and I know where that will happen."

"Then please tell me!"

"Do you really think I can do that?"

"Eh?"

Ralf saw the question in her eyes from close range and he spoke to her.

"You're practically falling apart."

"…"

"Staying near that shadow of a man any longer will only bring you grief and death!"

"But…"

He shook his head to reject that word.

"Don't you get it!? No matter how long you stay by his side and no matter how much you love him, you will never get anything in return!"

"I-I am not trying to get anything in-…"

"You are. You're waiting for that. …That's why you never do anything on your own. Doing anything that ignores your past would destroy the connection you have with him now, so you don' t do anything."

She hung her head in his arm.

She bit her lip and held back her Open Words. She may have wanted to say something back at him.

He continued speaking so she would hear him and learn from his words. That was a minister's job.

"He is treating you like an object, but you are a human with a heart. You can't become a mere 'thing'. …Isn't your exhaustion now proof enough of that?"

He removed his hand from the door and brought his fingers to her mouth. He scooped up the blood remaining there and placed it on her lips as lipstick.

He took a breath and looked at her as if testing her.

"I never again want to lose someone I should have saved."

Tears welled up in her eyes when she heard that.

Her scarlet lips trembled slightly and spoke quietly.

"I…don't play fair, do I?"

"Eh?"

As he gave that questioning voice, she moved from his arm, grabbed the doorknob, and began to leave to search for Valeath on her own.

The words she spoke next were the last ones Ralf wanted to hear.

"I'm sorry."

He did not let her say any more.

He turned her around, gave her a deep embrace, and forcibly took her blood-soaked lips with his own.

He then Opened his past, what he desired, and everything he was thinking. At the very end, he Opened where Valeath had gone .

He simply could not bring himself to say it in words.

Part 4

The battle had only just begun.

The stalemate of trying to read the other's intention ended after only five minutes. Surprisingly, Valeath was the first to move. Amon moved in response to the sword strike.

Fifteen seconds after the beginning, Amon received his first injury.

Another minute and twenty-six seconds later, his fist struck Valeath's face for the first time.

A solid sound rang out.

"!"

Valeath held Amon back with his sword tip, ended his chained sword techniques, and put some distance between them. A trail of blood dripped from the corner of his mouth, but he wiped it away with a finger. The blood on his finger looked black in the moonlight.

"Interesting."

It was unclear whether his comment was directed at the dark appearance of his blood or the strike from Amon.

Meanwhile, Amon's shoulders were rising and falling as he corrected his fighting stance.

"That hit signals the beginning of my come-from-behind win."

Despite his words, Amon's expression was grim.

He was injured in one spot on the chest, two on the stomach, two on the back, nine on his limbs, and one on his face. It had been that much of a risk to get a single hit in on Valeath.

For the first time in his life, Amon was at a disadvantage.

He accepted it and Valeath probably did too. And since they both accepted it, it was Overridden as truth.

That truth said Amon could not defeat Valeath as he was.

"I see."

Amon gathered strength in his clenched fist and thought about his situation here.

He held his breath for a moment and finally nodded.

"Everything is finally turning out the way everyone wanted, Near Death Amon."

As he spoke to himself, he kicked powerfully off the stone pavement. He made a low and quick charge forward.

Valeath was right in front of him and Amon twisted his body while swinging up his right fist.

At the same time, Valeath used his sword for a mid-level guard. He intended to cut Amon's fist out of the way. It was a combination of offense and defense that was only possible with a sword.

However, a smile appeared on Amon's lips when he saw it. He looked like he wanted to say something, but he Closed himself off so as not to give away his intention.

An instant later, the fist moving toward Valeath's gut struck the stone pavement instead.

"Urah!"

The stone was audibly smashed.

Amon took a crawling pose and rotated his body around the fist he had thrust into the stone. He would use his extended legs to sweep Valeath's feet out from under him.

Due to his nearly crawling pose, Valeath vanished from his vision, but he did not care. This attack was guaranteed to hit an opponent so focused on his upper body.

This would defeat your average swordsman. An above average swordsman would jump back to avoid the kick and lose their balance. If he attacked then, he could win.

…I can win!

In his hurry, he Opened that thought, but a sudden impact sent him flying.

He heard the sound of popping muscles.

"!?"

Even after the tremendous force sent him flying and tumbling over his shoulder, Amon had no idea what had happened to him.

…What was that!?

The impact had hit him in the gut and there was only one way for that to have happened.

"You can kick!? I thought you were a swordsman!"

Valeath was neither a swordsman nor a mere fighter.

He was a Hound.

Amon clicked his tongue and pushed down on the ground with his hands to rise into a sprinting posture. Strength filled his gaze as he faced the one he needed to charge at.

But the shimmering of the sword was not there. Its owner had vanished as well.

…Where is he!?

He thought before looking to the left or right. Where was his opponent? He would not be to the left or right. This enemy would not choose an attack so boring and predictable.

The answer came with an instantaneous flash if insight.

Amon looked up into the night sky that he could not fly through.

"There!?"

Darkness spread out before his eyes.

The darkness blocking the moonlight took the form of a coat. And a line of light silently stuck out from beyond that darkness as it was raised overhead.

A strike from four meters in the air arrived. A solid hit would slice him in two from head to crotch. Amon could not allow anything like that to happen.

He tried to run, but a voice reached him from above.

"It is no use. My hand touched you earlier."

And…

"The Over Contract has already been applied."

What is he talking about? wondered Amon as he bent backwards.

However…

"!?"

He could not move his left arm. That one arm would not follow the rest of him as if it had been frozen in space.

He frantically Overrode his body, but the arm still would not move. It felt glued in place. Even if he tried to run or lower his hips , his left arm would catch there.

"It's over."

The darkness descended and a silver curve drew a sharp line straight down.

Seeing that light, Amon reflexively moved.

"Daaahhh!"

He used his right fist to punch his left arm as hard as he could.

He heard a dull impact and the dry creaking of his bones. A black light appeared around his arm and drew a knot-like design.

After another audible impact, the pitch black light burst and Amon was blasted to the right.

He had resorted to forcing his way out of it, but he had escaped the Over Contract.

"Ow, ow, ow. Why is a human using a demon's-…"

He never finished his complaint.

As he got up, he saw Valeath's second merciless strike. He had his feet on the ground, so the slash had enough speed to make the sword bend.

It sliced through the wind and literally flew faster than sound.

Amon reacted by lowering his hips to the ground. He could not avoid the attack this time. He would be killed before the moonlit sword's path had drawn even a half circle. What he had desired for so long and what he had wished for in his nightmares would finally reach him.

…Destiny, hm?

He thought about that word he never used and prepared to accept it. The faces of the people he had lost appeared in his head and suddenly a certain girl's face came to him. This girl had her eyes closed.

…Why!?

Valeath's sword raced toward him before he received an answer .

And in that instant…

…Stop!

With an Opened rebuke in a female voice, something white dropped between Amon and Valeath.

It was an animal with obvious intent to attack.

It was enveloped in a prickly aura.

"!"

Even Valeath was caught off guard. He forcibly stopped his sword and jumped back to prepare himself. After a long time in the air, he silently landed and looked down. He faced what had fallen from above and stopped him.

"…"

Valeath and Amon looked at what stood between them.

It was a cat.

Amon recognized the cat and he called her name.

"Fir!?"

At the same time, someone called both the men's names.

"Amon!"

"Master Valeath!"

Amon realized who it was running toward him and who it was that had kept him from dying.

The person panting and running from the woods was indeed the blind girl.

Part 5

She was approximately ten meters away, the moon was the only source of light, and everything looked vaguely pale.

However, Moyla accurately saw the girl and young man standing in front of her.

The young man had a similar presence to Valeath and the girl resembled her. She was fairly certain their names were Amon and Klausl.

…I was right.

Moyla looked at Valeath, but he was not looking back at her. His eyes were still glued to his target.

"Why are you here?"

His prompt reprimand had a low, deep ring to it. It was one of the few times a hint of emotion was noticeable in his voice.

Moyla did not answer.

Answering would not help and not answering or saying anything else meant he could not reject what she said.

"…"

Valeath said nothing more, took a step forward, and turned his back on her.

She watched his back as he walked toward his target.

As he moved one, two, and then three steps away from her, she felt her pulse speeding up, bit by bit.

She had not come here to look at his back. She had something to tell him and something she wanted him to hear. She had come here to stand by his side.

Ralf's face briefly flashed through her mind.

That acted as a cue for her.

She raised her head and faced the leaving back.

…Wait!

Just as her pulse truly began to race, she cried out loud.

"Master Valeath! What will killing that young man accomplish!?"

He did not respond.

But she opened her mouth regardless with only one thing in her mind.

…Turn around! And answer me!

She took a breath.

"What will killing yourself accomplish!? Master Valeath! Do you hate yourself that much for not saving Lady Melda!?"

Her words just kept coming. She did not try to catch her breath. She simply shouted the one thought that had filled her heart for so long but that she had sealed away deep inside her because she did not dare say it.

"Why… Why won't you forget the past!?"

Her shoulders rose and fell and Valeath gave a concise answer.

He ignored her.

He did not turn around.

He raised his sword and did not answer Moyla's desperate question. He did not stop walking, he did not turn toward her, and he moved silently forward.

"Ah…"

Moyla realized her question was meaningless. She realized she could not change anything.

…Why?

Questioning it was a waste of time.

Valeath did not stop. He was continuing the fight, so she had to support him.

"…"

Did her thoughts mean nothing to him?

…I…

While unknowingly Opening her thoughts, she folded her fingers half on instinct. Light gathered in those fingers and a round bullet of light instantly grew to an intense flash.

…In the end, nothing has changed.

Valeath would not accept her feelings. No matter what she did or how long she waited, nothing would change.

She gave a sigh of resignation and gathered strength in the light floating in her hands. Once it burst, it would become a fiercely directional spear of light that could pierce through anything.

Normally, her job was only to cover for Valeath, but the feelings in her heart led her to choose a different role.

She directly targeted Amon.

In the distance, that wingless demon had taken a defensive stance as he tried to protect the girl named Klausl.

That was the young man who so resembled Valeath.

“Shoot him!”

Once those words escaped her mouth, the girl behind Amon noticed what she was doing.

“Don’t!”

With rushed movements, Klausl stood in front of Amon and shouted her thoughts to Moyla in a clear voice.

“Do you understand what you’re doing!?”

Those words woke Moyla’s heart.

…!

Sense returned to her somehow desperate mind.

However, she could do nothing about the spell now that it was activated.

The spear of light fired from her hands a moment later.

With a great flash of light, the scent of scorched air reached her nose.

However, the soaring spear of light did not hit Amon.

It flew straight forward and landed a direct hit on the girl who stood in front of him.

A great bursting sound filled the air.

"!"

Someone cried out. Or perhaps it was everyone.

Klausl's left arm burst with the sound of shattering glass.

Her body trembled from the shock and she started to collapse, but Amon awkwardly caught her in his arms.

…*Ah.*

In a blank, wordless state, Moyla suddenly gasped.

Something was rising within her body. Her breathing stopped, her voice was destroyed, and something rose to the surface.

She could not hold it back.

"Kah!"

As soon as she opened her mouth, she brought a hand to her lips, but the action proved meaningless.

She coughed and enough blood spewed out to spill between her fingers and down her chin. Unlike before, she coughed up a fist-sized clump of blood. Her body forced out so much of that warm precious substance.

Her vision gradually darkened.

"Ellis!"

She heard Valeath's voice calling her true name. Or she thought she did.

Thinking she had to be hearing things, she closed her eyes.

Part 6

Before Valeath could support the woman who fell backwards, Amon wrapped his arms around Klausl.

"You idiot!" he shouted as he embraced her.

Klausl smiled in his arms. It was a smile he had seen somewhere before.

She also tried to look up at his face.

"Thank goodness."

After that quiet comment, strength left her body. She had likely lost consciousness.

No matter what it was Amon wanted to say, he could not bring himself to say anything and he held her tighter in his arms.

But he could not let his guard down yet.

"I'm sorry."

He forcibly tore his vision off of her and glared at the enemy he had been facing.

Valeath looked back while also holding someone in his arms.

"To hell with this!"

Amon had no idea who he was talking to.

Suddenly, the stone pavement burst below his feet.

After a short delay, he heard a gunshot.

"Moyla!"

With that cry, someone ran out from the forest to the side. He was dressed like a minister and held a long gun.

He was clearly a new enemy.

"Valeath! Hurry up and take her away! I'll finish them off!"

The cat version of Fir at Amon's feet bared her fangs at the man's words.

The threat must have reached him because he aimed his gun at the cat while still facing Valeath.

"Outta the way, Fir!"

Amon did not hesitate to kick Fir away and jump for himself. The stone was once more smashed to pieces where Fir had been a moment before.

…This isn't good!

While facing his enemy, Amon focused on the girl in his arms.

He felt her breathing and her pulse.

She was alive.

He took a breath and a step back, but…

"I can't exactly let you escape now that you've seen our faces."

Amon heard those words and saw the muzzle of a gun.

…!

He turned to the side to protect Klausl from the path of the bullet that was sure to come.

…Amon!

He heard Fir's Open Words just as something grazed his ear as it flew in from behind him.

"?"

Before he could ask anything, the gunshot mercilessly sounded.

Immediately afterwards, he heard a scream.

The voice of pain came from the man who had been holding the long gun.

"Gwaah!"

Amon looked back in surprise and realized the man's right arm was gone. The arm that had held the gun had fallen to the stone pavement.

…*What!?*

Whatever had grazed by Amon's ear must have severed the man's arm.

The man held his hemorrhaging shoulder, but he did not seem to know what had injured him either. He seemed confused as he endured the pain and the disturbance filling him was obvious.

He did not know what had happened and no one gave an answer. The only sound was the distant siren of a Yard police car.

That signaled the end of the battle.

"Ralf! We're leaving!"

By the time Valeath's voice rang out, he was already gone. He had Overlossed himself somewhere to hid his form.

Ralf looked down at his own arm on the ground and picked up only the gun. He then looked at a certain point behind him and clicked his tongue.

"This just isn't my day!"

He leaped and his one-armed minister's outfit instantly vanished into the darkness.

The only people left were Fir in her cat form, Amon, Klausl in his arms, and…

"I see you are all still alive. You're a lot of trouble, you know that?"

With that voice, someone appeared behind them.

…*Inspector!*

Amon turned around when he heard Fir's Open Words.

"!?"

The Inspector was indeed standing there.

The middle-aged man had the same look, same feel, and same attire as when Amon had seen him two years prior.

"Were you the one that fired something in to save us?"

"What are you talking about?"

The Inspector seriously wrinkled his brow in the moonlight and his thoughts were impossible to read.

Amon sighed and looked to the girl in his arms.

"!"

His heart skipped a beat.

There was not a hint of blood on the rolled-up sleeve of her blouse.

He quickly realized why.

Her left arm was hollow.

"Eh?"

Her broken upper arm only contained a narrow metal rod as a central support and several wires running through it. There was no way she could bleed like that. Instead, a few wires were dangling down from the damaged point.

Her skin seemed to be made of ceramic.

She was artificially made.

However, this was different from the prosthetics used by Hard Wolves and other combat races. The body in his arms had the body heat of human skin, had a pulse, and was soft. It felt like a real body.

In that case, she was…

"A doll?"

The cat mewed and replied.

…That's right. She's a Sein Frau. An automaton. And you won't find one better made even here in London.

Without even nodding at Fir's Open Words, Amon turned to the Inspector.

"What am I supposed to do?"

"The man who made her is in Scotland Yard."

"I'm going on ahead."

He began to run.

The Sein Frau girl in his arms had her eyes closed as always, but her eyebrows were slightly stiff and her breathing was very, very shallow.

He bit his lip, looked down, and spoke.

"I'm sorry."

He faced forward and toward the park's exit.

"I got careless."

Beginning to run caused blood to flow from the various wounds across his body. They left red dots along the path. He spilled countless signs indicating the path he was taking.

But his focus was entirely on the girl in his arms.

…This idiot is all that matters. As long as she…

He was the only one that knew how that sentence ended.

Chapter 5: Manmade Doll

Part 1

A plain concrete workroom existed on Scotland Yard's first basement.

The underground room was small but well equipped, so it somewhat resembled a medical examination room.

That room was Klausl's "home".

A waist-high table had a white sheet laid over it and Klausl lay on it after having lost her left arm.

Amon stood next to the table and he tapped his fingers in annoyance. Based on the bandages wrapped around his body, his treatment seemed to be complete.

He glared at the partition set up in the back of the room. There must have been someone behind it because sounds of movement could occasionally be heard.

"Are you still not ready? I'm already done."

A face poked out from the side of the partition. It was an old man who had likely been human to begin with. He had a gentle face with sage-like features that made it impossible judge his age.

He opened his narrow eyes wide and glanced at Amon.

"Don't get so worked up, young one. With a daughter of mine, an injury like this is nothing to worry about."

And…

"It's just been so long since Klausl was damaged this badly that my repair tools are scattered all over the place. …Oh, here's the wrench I need."

The old man tossed a few tools over the partition and onto the floor. A wrench, pliers, a drill for making screw holes, and others clattered loudly to the floor.

Amon frowned at the racket.

"Hurry it up, old man!"

"My name isn't old man. It's Flandre Aileppoc."

"Who the hell's gonna use a weird name like that?"

"You're not going to use my name? Don't be so embarrassed, young one."

Flandre vanished behind the partition again.

Amon intentionally Opened his thoughts so the man could hear .

…I guess I shouldn't be surprised an idiot has an idiot for a father.

Suddenly, the door opened.

Amon quickly Closed his mind, turned around, and saw something that should not have been possible.

Klausl stood in the room's entrance.

"Eh?"

With a truly foolish look on his face, he quickly turned toward the Klausl sleeping behind him.

The girl with her left arm missing was still sleeping there.

Meanwhile, the Klausl who had entered the room bowed toward him and walked past him toward the partition.

"Father, the coffee is ready."

She Overrode a tray of cups and turned back to Amon.

"I prepared some for you too. I will leave it over here, so feel free."

"S-sure."

Whether she heard his response or not, the moving Klausl looked at the identical girl lying on the table and sighed.

"I hope she gets better soon."

She then jogged out of the room.

As she passed by him, Amon looked carefully at her face. But no matter how close he looked, she looked identical to the Klausl on the table. Even so…

…She's different?

He had a feeling something was different. There was some kind of gap between the two Klausls.

"Hey, old man."

"I know what you're Opening."

"Who…was that?"

"Klausl. She's the 29th, so the third from last."

"The 29th?"

Flandre stepped out from behind the partition while wrapping wire around a thick metal rod.

"You saw the arm of the one on the table there, right? Klausl is a Sein Frau. She's a mass-produced doll."

"!"

Amon had no words. He Closed all of his thoughts and looked to Klausl in front of him.

"You can't believe it?" asked Flandre before continuing as if testing Amon. "A Sein Frau is a doll machine that simply carries out its orders and has no life of its own. They're like a golem."

He took a breath.

"Do you know why a Sein Frau with no life of its own was with you?"

A normal person would have said a Sein Frau had no heart and thus anything they did was part of a job.

But Amon did not give that answer. He stared silently down at Klausl's face.

She was always smiling, but now her expression was one of faint exhaustion.

"…?"

He suddenly remembered her making a similar expression before. It had been that morning when she had lent him her lap. She had made this expression while suffering from a nightmare.

"!"

At that very moment, he clenched his fists and spoke with a decisive look.

"Enough nonsense. Hurry up and start healing her."

"You sure are impatient. You must clash with Klausl a lot."

The old man was dead on.

Amon clicked his tongue and frowned, so Flandre said more.

"I'll be ready once I finish wrapping this. Then I can start fixing her right away. You remove her blouse."

"What?"

Flandre turned toward Amon's confused voice.

"Can't you do it? I'd rather not let other people see my daughter's body either."

"Keh. So you're a perverted old man who wants his daughter to himself?"

"Shut up and do it already."

"Then why don't you do it?"

Even as he said that, Amon moved behind Klausl and weakly lifted her. She was completely limp. He rested her head against his chest and her soft blonde hair swayed a bit.

The sweet scent of her hair faintly reached him.

"…"

She was strangely feminine at times like this.

He intentionally kept his movements businesslike as he corrected her posture and removed one shoulder strap of her apron skirt. The left strap had already come off, so the apron skirt fell down to her waist.

And suddenly…

"Don't get any funny ideas, young one."

"Sh-shut up!"

He clicked his tongue again and turned to Flandre.

The old man had his back to him.

Amon tilted his head before getting back to work. He tried to remove the crimson scarf from her blouse collar.

"Hey, old man."

"What?'

"Do you know how to remove a scarf?"

"I'll only tell you if you ask more politely."

"…Please tell me."

"I don't know either."

"I'm gonna kill you!"

"You only asked if I knew. You really are a lot of trouble. Just tug on it randomly."

He did as the man suggested.

"I'm pretty sure this is strangling her."

"Then pull the other way."

He did so and the scarf did come off even if he still doubted the validity of the man's instructions. He draped the red cloth over his shoulder and reached for the blouse's buttons.

Just as his hands hesitated in front of the first button, it happened again.

"Hey, young one."

He jumped.

"Wh-what?"

"Are you good with your fingers?"

"Of course I am. I'm not old and frail like you."

"I am not old and frail. I'm just farsighted and my fingers tremble a bit due to my high blood pressure."

"That's what being old and frail means!"

He sighed, but the exchange must have helped him relax because he casually unbuttoned Klausl's blouse and removed it.

This exposed her slender shoulders and her chest. He supported her back with a hand and her skin felt damp and warm.

Even if she was unconscious, he could not exactly stare. He quickly looked to her left shoulder instead. Looking back at the break, he noticed it was a little melted.

Her arm had likely burst from the heat more than the impact.

He imagined being hit by something similar and gulped.

"…Sorry."

"Hm? Did you say something?"

"Nothing."

"Remove her bra too, young one."

He said nothing in response and did so with no inappropriate thoughts. He then lay her white body down on the table.

Her body seemed like the ideal form of a young and quiet woman.

"What do you think?"

"Eh? Oh, she's beautiful."

"What are you talking about? I mean her left arm."

Flandre turned toward him with a bitter smile.

"Now, let's get started."

The old man placed an arm on her side and looked at her body as if inspecting it.

"Hm."

"Don't just say 'hm'. How is she?"

"Just watch."

The skinny arm of an old man reached out and the dried fingers poked lightly at Klausl's left collarbone and below her chest.

"!"

Cracks ran along her skin.

Flandre turned to Amon.

Amon said nothing, so the old man gave a satisfied nod and drew his thumb deep along the cracks. His thumb ran from her left shoulder, to her left collarbone, between her breasts, below her left breast, to her left side, and back up to her left shoulder.

The sound it made was the irresponsibly commonplace sound of a box opening. The skin surrounding the cracks opened like a panel.

"What?"

It looked like a piece of a sculpture and Flandre placed it below the table. It had been as soft as real skin before, but for some reason, it made a metallic sound.

"Surprised?"

It was a strange sight.

There was a lung-shaped hole in the left side of Klausl's chest and a skeleton, gears, rims, and other objects made of different colors of metal were visible inside. It almost looked like a clock had been tied together with wire and stuffed inside a human body.

Also, it all moved, stretched, contracted, and pulsed with a rhythm much like the beating of a living creature's heart.

The machine was alive.

"Look."

Flandre pointed toward the left side of Klausl's chest.

There was a red wooden gear there.

It was small enough to hide in the palm and it turned with a tempo much like a beating heart.

"I believe this gear is her heart," said Flandre.

"Her heart?" asked Amon.

Flandre gave a deep nod.

"I can tell you about that later. More importantly, the left shoulder connector was damaged on the inside too. We'll need to replace some parts in here."

He then said something unbelievable.

"You fix her, young one."

"…"

"Here, you'll need this wrench first."

When he saw the tool he was handed, Amon came to his senses and frantically shouted back.

"D-don't be stupid! Why do I have to fix her!?"

"Because I'm 'old and frail'. My fingers aren't too steady anymore."

Amon was speechless and Flandre smiled.

"Don't worry. I'll tell you what to do."

Part 2

Westminster Cathedral's bell sounded in the distance. The bell rang nine times before stopping along with the music.

The night was filling with activity. It was a clear night, so the city's lights were easily visible.

Countless red lights floating in the darkness looked like flowers blooming in a forest. It was clear that many lives were visiting those flowers. That was how attractive the lights and night scenery were.

A bedroom in the Savoy Hotel had an excellent view of that scenery.

However, the two in that room were not looking out the window.

The two humans were Valeath and Moyla.

Just under an hour had passed while Moyla lay on the tall bed and Valeath stared down at her in silence.

She had come to earlier and had been staring up at him with a weak look in her eyes and shallow breathing.

Her skin was so white it reflected the electric lights. It looked like it was made of plaster instead of being sickly pale. The blanket was decorated with a floral pattern, but that only made an even starker contrast with her cold complexion.

"…"

Suddenly, she looked away from Valeath and asked a question.

"This is goodbye, isn't it?"

"You will not last until the morning."

He spoke as if it were his duty to provide an accurate answer.

But she narrowed her eyes and turned back to him with a weak but definite smile on her lips.

"You finally responded to my voice."

He did not nod, but she continued smiling.

"I'm glad."

With those quiet words, she closed her eyes, brought a hand to her forehead, and hid her eyes from the electric lights.

"I really tried to kill that young man…who so resembled you. I truly, truly…truly hated him. But just as I fired, that girl called out to me and, the next thing I knew, I had fired on my other self."

And…

"When I saw her collapse, something broke inside my body."

She gently coughed. It was not a deep cough. It sounded like she was hiccupping or swallowing something.

After a pause, the coughing fit passed and her breathing was more erratic than before.

But she could not stop speaking.

The words inside her came to the surface and refused to be hidden.

"If I don't keep waiting and if I don't believe that you will return to the person you used to be… If I don't believe that, I could never look Lady Melda in the eye. I…I…"

Just as her voice threatened to vanish, something very strange occurred.

Someone squeezed the hand she held over her eyes.

"…!?"

Her eyes were exposed below the electric lights and tears flowed from them. But even so, she could clearly see the man who held her hand.

"Ah…"

The man in her blurry vision was Valeath.

His expression and general atmosphere remained unchanged, but he stood next to the bed and held her hand.

And that was enough.

She tried to say something, but she simply could not form the words.

She directly Opened the words in her heart.

…I don't want to die.

He had to have seen those words, but he did not react.

Regardless, she brought her mind to the surface. She almost did not seem to care if he ignored her as she silently said what she had been unable to say before.

…I don't want to die. I don't want to die. I want to be by your side even longer.

More tears accompanied her Open Words and she suddenly felt more comfortable. It felt like she was crumbling in some way. This was a more pleasant death than Ashing. She was being erased through the process of Balance Fall.

…No.

With her eyes closed, she used her own words instead of Open Words. She spoke to Valeath using the words only she could.

"Use your Over Contract on me."

Her following words were her first and last confession.

"Make me yours, Master Valeath."

Part 3

Two people sat on the cement staircase leading to the workroom below the Yard.

They were Amon and Flandre.

"A Sein Frau, hm?"

The older one nodded at the younger one's comment.

"You won't find any others that well-made even in London. At present, there are twenty-six of them in Scotland Yard."

"Come to think of it, London was flooded with them that one time."

"Oh, that. The one needed to prepare for staying at your place, so they all discussed it and worked together."

"They all look the same, but they're different inside?"

"They're fundamentally the same, but they change based on their experiences after birth."

Hearing that, Amon asked another question.

"What was that you said about a heart earlier?"

"Once, that girl's older sister – I think it was the second oldest – was killed."

Amon opened his mouth, but ended up not saying anything.

Flandre continued speaking.

"I created them as daughters, but the world at large sees Sein Fraus as tools and machines. The killer was never charged with a crime."

"That's not an uncommon story."

"Yes. And my daughters… They can be replaced with a mere fifty pounds. And that's why I've made so many of them. Only after that was I able to create that gear I showed you. That gear is what allows her to learn sensitivity and emotions."

"Isn't it memories or something in your head you need to think about things?"

"Even with memories, they only gain the ability to make decisions. To use memories for yourself, you require a type of individuality, right? And that sense is honed by using it yourself."

"This is getting complicated."

"No, you just aren't very smart."

"Shut up. Anyway, so I take it that gear is literally her heart." Amon nodded. "So if she can experience different things and create her own heart, then what about her body?"

"Her body?"

"Why does she keep her eyes closed?"

"Because she does not feel the need. Just as there are blind fish in the deep sea, Klausl does not require sight at the moment."

Flandre turned around.

"Originally, none of them were as human as they are now. This is what you call the Coppélia effect. Didn't you hear about that as a child? It's an old story about how furniture or other items used for many long years will gain a life of their own and become an actual life form."

"Sorry, but I don't remember being told fairy tales as a child."

"I see." Flandre nodded. "This is related to the formation of their heart, but when I first stored my daughters here, most of them could not even speak."

"And?"

"They probably felt the need to use words in order to help people. After a while, every last one of them was cheerfully speaking. And from there they gained a sense of taste to cook food for the workers here and learned to smile to help calm people. Recently, they've even learned to sulk and get a little angry."

"So why is she still blind?"

Flandre shook his head.

"I don't know. She needs an impetus, but she also needs to personally think it's necessary. And I can't exactly give her false eyes after so long. …Does she not want to see her father's face?"

"Well, there's definitely no point in looking at some old man."

Flandre glanced over at Amon, sighed, and relaxed his expression.

"But, young one, you seem to be quite the interesting fellow. I'm grateful that you actually treat her like a human. That one especially has been worried about whether she has a heart ever since her sister died."

"Don't bow to me, idiot. You don't know what's going to happen now that I know she's a doll. In fact, now I doubt she has a heart."

"Really? I doubt that's what you really think."

"Don't act like you understand me."

With those words, Amon stood.

"Where are you going?" asked Flandre.

Amon's response was brief.

"There's someone I want to see. I've got some complaints I need to make."

Part 4

Ralf sat in a Savoy Hotel hallway.

He leaned his back against the black wall and kept an eye out to protect the door leading to the room Valeath and Moyla were inside.

His face was expressionless and he said nothing, but he held his right shoulder in his hand as if to hide the missing arm. The shoulder was wrapped in bandages and blood seeped into them in the shape of his fingers.

He had been sitting out here ever since they had returned the night before and Valeath had entered the room carrying Moyla. He had not moved in the slightest.

Not long before, he had heard a bell ring five times.

It was morning already. It was time for people to wake up.

But he did not try to get up or stand up. Instead, he muttered under his breath.

"Truly, god will not save us."

He ended his words with a sigh. It was a heavy sigh. It floated white in the air and dissolved into the hallway air. It became one with London's air.

"…"

After seeing his sigh fuse with London's air, he began to close his eyes.

But in that instant…

"…?"

He heard something. It was a quiet, slow, and yet continuous sound from beyond the door next to him.

He heard footsteps.

Someone was walking this way in order to leave the room.

Light filled Ralf's eyes.

At the same time, the door opened.

He looked up on reflex and saw who stood there.

"Valeath."

Valeath held a hand on his sheathed sword and looked down at Ralf.

And…

"I will go hunt more voices. We still need eighteen more races."

Ralf stood at that. His gaze rose higher than Valeath's in an instant and he asked a question.

"What happened to Moyla!?"

"…"

"Did she Ash!? Or did she Balance Fall? Either way, did you take care of her to the end!?"

He finished shouting, grimaced, and held his right shoulder.

Meanwhile, Valeath said nothing and took a step into the hall.

"Answer me, Valeath!"

Only after snapping at the man did Ralf notice something.

Someone who should not have been there stood where Valeath had been. She should have been dead and yet she stood there.

Ralf called her name.

"Moy…la?"

Moyla had been unconscious and dying when she had been brought here, but now she stood next to Valeath.

And she stood firmly on two legs.

"…"

Ralf was confused, but he forced a smile that did not reach his eyes and he lightly raised a hand.

"Oh… That's great, Moy-…"

She began walking without even hearing him out and her expression seemed somehow blank.

"Moyla?"

He called out to her as she passed by.

She said nothing and did not turn toward him.

She simply continued forward. She was not avoiding him. She walked slowly at an even pace as if she could not even see him there.

Her movements lacked the previous unreliableness of the sick.

"Wait…"

He started after her to stop her and he grabbed her hand.

As soon as he did, he heard the sound of a match being struck.

"!"

He frantically let go of her and opened his own hand.

Bluish-white smoke rose from his fingers. The surface was drawn tight and looked burned.

He frantically looked to her and saw similar smoke rising from her hand where he had grabbed her.

He knew the identity of that raw-smelling smoke. As a minister, he knew all too well.

"When an unclean one contacts a holy man…"

At that point, he realized everything that had happened.

He turned his back on Moyla, faced Valeath, and shouted at the man.

"Are you moving her corpse with an Over Contract!?"

Valeath remained silent, but that was enough of an answer.

Ralf approached him. He used the shocking action to Task himself and grabbed Valeath's collar with his one arm.

"What are you thinking!?"

Valeath maintained his silence, but Ralf did not care. He pulled the collar toward himself and glared directly into Valeath's eyes.

"She was exhausted from being with you so long! Being freed from that life would have saved her! Even if it came in the form of death! But you…! You…!"

Ralf shoved Valeath away.

Valeath swayed one light step back, but his expression and general atmosphere remained unchanged. Ralf was the one to press his back against the wall and limply slide to a sitting position .

"How could you do this?" he muttered.

"Because I decided it was for the best," replied Valeath.

His tone said he would reject anything more on the topic and he started to walk away. He spoke once more without turning back toward Ralf.

"We will carry out the mission tonight. You heal that arm."

Ralf held his stump of a right shoulder as he listened to the fading footsteps.

He hung his head and curled up as if to seal himself off from the outside world.

And…

"Why can I never save anyone?"

Part 5

Amon woke shortly before noon.

He must have been quite tired the night before because he had not had a single dream, nightmare or otherwise.

His sleepy mind was lightly woken by the pain of his healing wounds and he took a breath.

"I guess I should make some food."

He entered the unfamiliar kitchen and realized something.

"There are no matches."

…That's weird. She cooked in here just fine for the past few days.

That brought to mind that Sein Frau girl.

"That idiot must have them."

She seemed to specialize in cooking, so it would not surprise him to find she had the matches. She could have slipped them into her skirt pocket.

"With that mirror she can't use."

He held his head in his hands, shook his head a few times, and Tasked himself out loud.

"I need to stay away from her."

He clicked his tongue and grabbed the coat hanging on the wall. This was not the one he had worn last night. It was a new one. The previous one was torn up and hanging on a beam in the back of the room.

"…"

He looked at the coat and all the cuts covering it as he put on the new one.

"I lost."

His gaze would not leave that torn-up jacket.

He reached out and grabbed it. The fabric was rough in places. He guessed that was from the dried blood.

He kicked open the trashcan lid and prepared to throw the old jacket inside.

"Oh, right. This is in there."

He stuck a hand in the old jacket's inner pocket.

He Overrode what was inside and grabbed it.

It was Jonathan's demon contract.

The emblem, writing, and format on the parchment went through all the proper procedures for a demon contract. There was not a single omission or mistake. With the target individual, it could be immediately activated.

But…

"I can't use it."

He was a demon, but he had no wings and had not awoken to his power. Even a perfect contract like this was worth no more than a scrap of paper to him. It was a meaningless possession.

To him, it was only a written plea for revenge.

"Did that old man want me to take revenge for him?"

He suddenly remembered the message Jonathan had left along with the parchment. The words had been carved into the door.

"Live on, while fearing no evil whatsoever."

After repeating the words to himself, he smiled bitterly.

"Not a chance. This time, I'm dying. …And that's what everyone wants, isn't it?"

He spoke to no one in particular, folded the parchment in half, and put it in his pocket.

He then did not hesitate to throw out the old jacket.

A knock came on the apartment's door.

"!?"

He quickly moved to the hallway. Just as his footsteps rang through the hallway, the apartment's front door slowly opened and sunlight poured in.

…Who is it?

He narrowed his eyes at the backlight, Opened a certain thought, and saw someone there.

The person must have read his thought because she lightly raised a hand and spoke.

"No, it's not Klau. It's Fir."

He Overrode his surroundings when he heard Fir's voice. After a short time lag, his eyes adjusted to the light and saw her in her uniform.

He sighed.

"Oh, it's just you."

"I just told you it was."

She smiled and stepped out of the backlight.

"Klau's better, but she's not coming.

She entered the apartment's hallway as nimbly as a cat and stood next to him.

"You told the Inspector you would give the Yard all the information you have if he removed Klau from observer duty, remember?"

"That's because she was in the way."

"Liar."

She sounded somehow happy and Amon frowned.

"What do you mean?"

"You really don't get it? …Or do you not want to get it?"

"Get what? Just tell me."

"I already did. You're a liar. There's no more to it than that."

She laughed and gently struck his chest.

He wordlessly swept her hand aside and crossed his arms. He looked at Fir with a somewhat suspicious look in his eyes.

She exasperatedly shrugged her shoulders and Overrode a large manila envelope in her hand.

"You asked the Inspector about one thing other than Klau, right ? You asked to fight them."

After seeing him nod, she handed him the envelope.

"He agreed. We're gathering at eleven tonight so we can attack them while they sleep."

She thought for a moment.

"The Inspector…seems to have trouble with you."

"I don't like him either."

He sounded annoyed and she gave a bitter smile.

"So the feeling's mutual, is it? The envelope has what information we have on them."

"I'm already looking through it."

He held a report. The front must have been a copy of the paperwork made when they entered the country. The top of the report gave a name.

That name was Rickland Valeath.

"The information the Yard has turned up is written on the back. His real name is Reichle Borderson. He's a top class Hound. The total number of non-humans he's defeated is in the triple digits."

"Interesting."

Amon's comment sounded disconnected from her explanation.

He was looking at the field on the paperwork labelled "Reason for Visit".

One would normally write "sightseeing" or "schoolwork", but this contained something much more befitting of Valeath.

"To find a place to die, hm?"

Amon spoke the words aloud as if to hear them himself.

Chapter 6: Honest Confession

Part 1

Music played while a bell rang eleven times.

London's night was reaching its high point.

The times when humans slept were the best times for monsters.

At that time, a group of carts left the back of Scotland Yard. They were all drawn by Nightmares.

Why were they leaving the Yard? And why were they loaded with wooden boxes of bottles which were clearly not needed for criminal investigations?

The carts seemed odd when they first left the Yard, but as they moved slowly through the city, they soon blended into their surroundings.

Once they turned left in front of the Houses of Parliament, Scotland Yard was no longer visible behind them. At that point, they only looked like a wholesale seller transporting alcohol. London consumed a lot of alcohol during the night, so one could easily imagine these were meant to provide those drinks.

However, that was not the case.

After all, Amon was in control of the lead card.

He kept the horses moving a bit faster than normal and looked around.

Whitehall was lined with political buildings and it had a certain dignity to it even at night.

Everyone walking along the road was moving quickly because they had homes to return to.

"…"

Amon silently faced forward.

He had the horses race by so quickly no one could read his Open Words. He heard the Inspector speak from the second cart behind him, but he ignored the man.

He thought about a great many things all on his own.

They were quickly approaching the Savoy Hotel.

Part 2

"The preparations really took some time," said the Inspector as he stopped his cart behind the Savoy. "We're pretty late."

Fir glanced over at him from where she sat next to him in casual clothes.

"You're too obsessed with looking good. You said we needed to disguise ourselves so they wouldn't catch on, but then you ended up wearing your usual coat and suit."

"I realized a brewery disguise does not suit me."

"Quiet," cut in Amon.

He had already stepped down from his cart and stood at the Savoy's large back entrance. Unlike the main entrance, it was a plain metal door and it was currently closed.

"Did you have this closed to keep them from escaping? These are normally open at delivery time."

"The Inspector brought a hand to his chin and tilted his head.

"Hm. When I called the manager earlier, he told me to come right in."

Just as the man finished speaking, Amon placed a hand on the knob.

It opened surprisingly smoothly.

The white light of the hotel slowly cut into the darkness. It was brighter than they expected.

They all cautiously looked into the bright hallway.

"No one's here," muttered Amon as he moved inside the light.

"Hey! The first one in needs the warrant!"

He ignored the Inspector but stopped as soon as he set foot inside.

He saw a large metal door to his right.

The doorplate was polished enough to see his reflection and it said "Furniture Storage" in gold. The room likely stored their extra chairs, cupboards, and the like.

"That's not it."

He turned to a similar door on the opposite side. The gold word on its doorplate said "Kitchen".

A grim look filled his face when he read that word.

"So this is it."

"Hey! Don't do anything without permission! I am in charge of this-…!"

"Shut up! Just stay put!"

Amon cut off the Inspector and turned toward him, Fir, and the disguised police officers who had entered the hallway.

"Can't you smell this!? This is the stench of Ash!"

He opened the door in front of him and it flew open as if inviting him inside.

"!"

The scene before his eyes went beyond anything he had expected.

This was the result of mass-produced death.

Dark scorch marks could be seen on the floor, walls, and even the ceiling. These were undoubtedly the stains and scorch marks of blood and Ashing.

As they burned into Ash, they had seared their silhouettes into the surfaces they lay one. Some had collapsed atop the cooking tables, some had their upper bodies in the sink, and some had fallen on top of each other on the floor.

A lot of "cooking" had occurred in this kitchen.

No corpses remained. Instead, the pork legs and hunks of beef leftover from dinner were lying around and dripping blood.

"We messed up."

Amon did not sound all that bothered by it as he turned his back on the kitchen. That seemed to say that he had no business with the tragedy before his eyes and that this was only the beginning.

He walked further down the hallway.

"Hey, wait!"

He did not turn toward the voice behind him.

"Come with me and you'll die. I am Death Wish Amon after all."

With those parting words, he reached for the large door at the end of the hallway.

And he pushed open the double doors all at once.

The opening doors created convection in the air. The perfume-like aroma of the hotel flowed in, but it was accompanied by a stench of death even stronger than before.

"…!"

What Amon found beyond the door was exactly what he expected.

Part 3

The Savoy Hotel's lobby was spacious. It was large enough to hold an entire brigade and it felt like a temple with its many marble columns.

But at the moment, that lobby felt small.

It was littered with traces of murder that one had to avoid stepping on.

It was impossible to judge the details of what had happened here, but the general idea was clear. A great slaughter had occurred here as an Override of death. The scorch marks of Ashing could be seen on the floor, on the walls, on the columns, on the front entrance's windows, and even on the curtains.

No one had survived.

They had been thoroughly annihilated.

"They just killed as much as they could, didn't they?"

Amon walked to the center of the lobby and turned toward the Inspector and the others.

"So they were all still alive when you called about-…"

He stopped speaking midsentence.

As the others cautiously entered the lobby, they followed his gaze.

"What is it, Amon?" asked Fir.

"Up above!" he shouted.

Those who reacted appropriately to his words survived.

Those who did not took a bullet to the head, fell to the floor, and Ashed.

Eight gunshots sounded. The same number of flames burst out and scattered ash.

"…!"

The only survivors were Amon, the Inspector, and Fir.

"Wh-what was that!?"

Fir twisted in midair, landed, and looked back up.

Amon was already looking in that same direction.

He Overrode the terrace sticking out above the front desk.

"You."

A man dressed as a minister sat on the terrace railing.

He was the gunman who had lost his right arm.

He gently lifted the submachine gun in his left hand and greeted them.

"Hm. So when it's the police, a surprise attack isn't enough to wipe all of you out."

"Wipe us out? Do you really think you can do that when I am here?"

"Inspector, that doesn't sound very convincing when you're hiding behind a column."

Fir glanced over at her boss who had moved to a safe position at some point.

"H-hey," she said. "You're the Hound named Ralf Gurt, aren't you?"

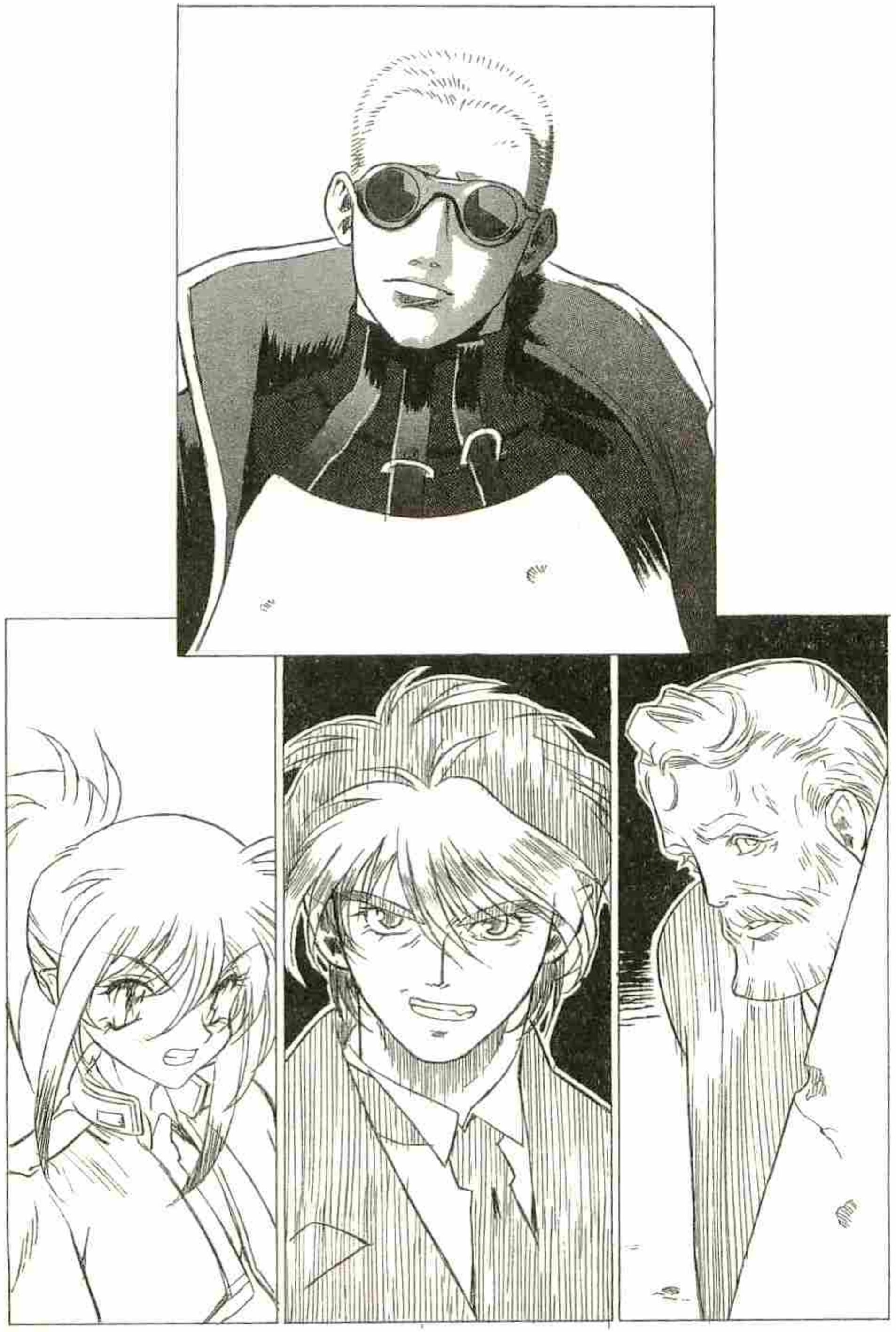
Ralf turned toward her on the railing.

"Just to be polite, I'll give you a warning," she announced without fear. "We got our information on you from the continent. Even if you kill us, you have nowhere to run. We have plenty of friends back on the continent. So…"

"So we should turn ourselves in and atone for our crimes?"

"Even the Grim Reaper lives in London. If you play your cards right, you can avoid going to hell."

Ralf gave a deep nod.



"You're telling me to seek salvation?"

He swung his arm as he asked that.

The arm that whished through the air was the right arm he had supposedly lost.

"!"

Everyone's eyes gathered on the arm just as the man Overrode it.

A false arm of metal dully reflected the light.

It expelled some steam from the shoulder, but it was not a combat arm like Hard Wolves used. It was simply a prosthetic meant to replace a lost body part, but…

"I didn't really think one made in London would attach to a human like me."

He gently swung the metal arm around, spread the dully glowing fingers, and clacked the metal nails together.

"I'm supposed to be a minister, but I just can't seem to save anyone. Not the villagers who relied on me and not even a single woman. So…"

So?

"I thought it would all be easier if I wasn't human. If I wasn't bound by the constraints and emotions of humanity, I wouldn't have to seek salvation!"

Once he said that, the sound of neighing and wheels on stone pavement came from the other end of the hallway Amon's group had entered through.

These were not the Nightmare-drawn carts prepared at Scotland Yard. A different cart had left.

…Who was that!?

To reach the answer, the Inspector spoke from behind the column.

"Come to think of it, you were gathering voices, weren't you? What for?"

"That's simple. To bring heaven down on London."

The others exchanged a glance at his casual answer.

The first to react was Fir.

"D-don't be ridiculous! You can't do that just by gathering voices."

"England is a world of words, isn't it? If I say we can do it, we can do it. …When the nine chapter title pages opened only slightly during the Great War, a massive amount of knowledge leaked

from heaven and into the human world. Technology flourished and even our nation of blood and iron made it just one step away from reaching space."

"Are you trying to bring that about again!? How!?"

Ralf smiled bitterly at Amon's question.

"Are you really people of England? The chapter title pages sealing the way to heaven are nothing more than the words 'Aerial City'! And can't words and sounds be drowned out by even greater ones!?"

"Don't be stupid. Not even the voices of monsters are powerful enough to break through the chapter title pages."

"Are you sure?"

With that question, Ralf Overrode a shotgun into his right hand. Its muzzle was pointed toward the column the Inspector hid behind.

A gunshot rang out and the surface of the column was blown away. Countless tiny holes were gouged into the marble like air bubbles.

"Let's say each of those holes is a single voice. Looking at it that way, it's true you can't shoot through a column just by gathering monster voices."

He Overlossed the submachine gun in his left hand to make it disappear.

"But what about like this?"

When he raised his left hand again, it held a rifle.

He showed no sign of aiming and slowly fired. The gunshot was far louder than the shotgun's.

The Inspector must have sensed danger in that great roar because he jumped out from behind the column and got down on the ground.

At the same time, something exploded.

"…!"

The destruction was over in an instant.

The column broke.

It was made of marble and had been large enough for the Inspector to hide behind, but it crumbled like it was bending its back.

Its pieces fell to the lobby carpet. Some stabbed into it, some collapsed onto their sides, some bounced, and some crumbled to dust. It was all covered by a dull yet intense sound.

The Inspector got up just as the final stone fell from the ceiling directly behind him. It split and broke with a sound that reverberated deep in their heads.

He glanced over at it.

"Ahh! My coat!"

The bottom of his coat had torn.

"I only bought that two weeks ago!"

"You're going to die along with it, so what does it matter?"

Ralf lowered his rifle.

"Do you understand!?"

He looked down on the three in the lobby.

"Tonight at midnight, we will gather together the voices we have collected and fire them into heaven! But we will be using more than just those voices. The voices of every monster in London will resonate with them and be fired along with them."

"Is that why you only collected the voices of Arche race monsters!?"

"Yes. That allows every monster's voice to resonate with them. And with a few million voices, destroying the chapter title pages will be easy. We have created this cannon to gain the knowledge of heaven, so we have named it the Babel Cannon."

The three in the lobby exchanged a glance.

…Can they actually make something like that?

Fir spoke to the Inspector with her Open Words.

"That previous cart must have been a hint. I expect it was heading to wherever this Babel Cannon is."

Where was that?

For all the others voices to resonate, it had to allow the sound to travel a long distance.

It had to take the shape of a tower-like cannon firing straight up into the sky.

And Ralf had specified it would be fired at midnight.

"…"

Amon was the one to come up with a location that met those conditions.

"Westminster Cathedral."

He looked to Ralf with strength in his golden eyes.

Ralf looked down at him, but his usual smile was gone. He met Amon's gaze for a while, but suddenly…

"Go on ahead. Valeath is there."

Amon broke into a run as if obeying him. He cut across the lobby and into the previous hallway to take one of the carts after Valeath.

"Amon!"

Fir tried to chase after him, but a bullet burst at her feet.

"!"

"I only said *he* could go."

Ralf Overlossed the guns in his hands and crossed his arms.

The sound of shattering glass briefly filled the lobby.

It shot out from Ralf in every direction and wind followed.

The heavy gust of wind blew away the scent of monsters hanging in the lobby and continued down the hallways.

"A barrier!?" shouted the Inspector.

Ralf nodded.

"It isn't as strong as Moyla's, but this is the combat barrier a holy man uses when hunting a monster. There is no escape for you ."

He jumped down from the terrace and his minister's clothing spread out behind him like black wings.

"Now, I need to kill you quickly! I plan to kill Valeath next!"

Part 4

A barrier closed behind Amon as he ran out of the hotel's back entrance.

"What!?"

He turned around and reached out a hand, but it was knocked back as if struck. His fingers and nails went numb. It was a powerful barrier.

"…!"

He grimaced a bit and stared past the invisible wall. The door at the other end of the hall had closed, so there was no way to know what was happening.

He just about gave a shout, but closed his mouth and stopped.

He turned his back on the hotel.

"I need to get to Westminster Cathedral."

He sounded like he was trying to convince himself and he walked over to the cart he had arrived on.

It belonged to Jonathan's brewery and he had to pursue Valeath with it.

As he approached the cart he needed to ride, he noticed something.

…?

He sensed an odd presence and Overrode his surroundings. He saw someone standing in front of the cart's front seat. He saw a girl standing in the darkness.

It was of course Klausl.

…!

Amon's mouth hung open for an instant, a number of expressions appeared in his mind, and he finally settled on a reaction.

"Y-you idiot! Why are you here!?"

He snapped at her, but she did not flinch back.

Despite his blatant rejection, she took a step toward him.

"The Inspector told me to check on the situation after you went inside and to provide support if anything happened."

"Him again."

He frowned and pointed at the hotel behind him.

"You can tell a barrier was put up, right? They're trapped inside ."

"Yes, so I sent out a clairvoyant letter a moment ago. Reinforcements will arrive soon."

"You sure are calm."

Amon sighed and seemed to remember what he needed to do. He walked past Klausl in order to board the cart.

"Please wait!"

She stopped him.

"Where are you going, Amon!?"

"If I tell you, you'll come with me."

She fell silent at that.

He placed a hand on her head and rubbed her soft blonde hair.

"I've sworn to take revenge. …And my old friends are calling for me."

At that very moment, he sensed something.

"…"

He heard something.

"Eh?"

He thought he heard Klausl speak. He had definitely heard something so quiet it barely qualified as a voice.

What had she said?

He looked down at her and saw her biting her lower lip, frowning, and hanging her head. There was no way she could have spoken like that.

He could definitely hear a voice, but he was not hearing it with his ears. These words seemed to Task him more directly. They were a cry of someone's will.

They were Open Words.

…You don't understand!

That was what her will said to him. She then shook her head to push aside his hand.

"You don't understand anything!"

The look on her face must have surprised him because he took a step back.

He put up his guard a little and stared at her.

"What don't I understand?"

It was a quiet question and she did not answer it.

Instead, she placed a hand on her chest and took a deep breath. She seemed to be applying Verbal Self Control. She firmly received his gaze and asked him a question.

"Why do you refer to yourself as Death Wish Amon?"

It was a simple question and Amon smiled bitterly as if it were a silly thing to ask.

"You read the Yard's data on me, right? Someone around me always dies. And they drive me onward by saying they wouldn't have died if it hadn't been for me."

He took a breath and hesitated, but ultimately continued.

"And I agree with them! If I weren't here, if I hadn't been born a demon, and if I'd never been here, things would be so much better!"

He looked to Klausl's face as he shouted at her.

She did not give a look of pity or sadness, but she did give him a look he could not quite put to words.

"…"

His expression briefly twisted when he saw that look, but…

"I understand. I really do! That's why I'm Death Wish Amon! That's what everyone wants! It's what Jonathan wants, what my mother wants, what Eilen wants-…!"

He stopped shouting there.

He was stopped by a strike to the cheek.

A sharp tone filled the night air. Like a wedge, it tore a hole in the mood filling that place.

And that hole took the form of silence.

"…"

Amon subconsciously brought a hand to his cheek and Klausl Tasked him.

…You don't understand!

"Why do you see it that way!? At the very least, I…I…"

She took a breath.

"I don't want you to die!"

She hung her head and clenched her fists, but Amon opposed that idea.

"D-don't be stupid!"

"I don't care if it's stupid! I'm used to being called that!"

She tilted her head.

"And it isn't just me. Fir, the Inspector, and everyone else don't want to see you die either! So why do you insist on finding a place to die!?"

"As long as I keep living, someone else is going to die. And yet I have an infinite lifespan as a demon. …So many people have died because I'm alive!"

Klausl looked up at that.

She brought her hands to her chest to create a dividing line and to gather her resolve.

"I am a Sein Frau, so I didn't die."

Amon gasped and she continued.

"You've accepted that I really am alive."

"…"

"So I'm glad that I'm a Sein Frau! Because I'm not a normal person and because I won't die, I can keep living forever and ever!"

She did not cry, but she did hang her head to hide her expression from him.

"…!"

He quickly looked away from her, Closed off all of his emotions , and stared up into the sky.

There was no fog this night.

However, the sky was cloudy. The clouds were lit by the city's lights and glowed white from below.

As he looked up at them, some words escaped his lips.

"I can't see it."

Was he looking for the moon? With a look of resignation, he looked back down and spoke to Klausl's downturned face.

"Anything you say is useless."

"Eh?"

She looked up, but he was not looking at her.

His gaze had dropped to the ground.

"No matter what I do, death is the only option. Are you sure you want to see that?"

She took his hand in hers.

"It will be okay."

Her words were not directed at anyone in particular.

Amon's expression changed as if that had been a sign. He gave a bitter smile.

"Sorry."

She frowned at that word.

"That is a bad habit of yours. …So where are you headed?"

She pulled on his hand and climbed onto the cart's front seat. Amon's bitter smile deepened as he answered.

"Westminster Cathedral. We need to hurry!"

Part 5

The cart took off with the two of them onboard.

Traveling to Westminster Cathedral required returning to the vicinity of Scotland Yard.

They raced down Whitehall and turned right in front of the Houses of Parliament. The wheels cried out along the pavement and the whip struck the horse. The cart began to tilt, but it shook and tilted back.

The cart shot down a long stretch of Victoria Street. Continuing this way would take them to Scotland Yard in five minutes. Another two minutes and they would reach Westminster Cathedral.

At their pace, that would be shortened a little.

They moved quickly.

Klausl drove from the front seat. She was new to this, but she gave it her all.

"You can be pretty reckless when you need to be," shouted Amon as the wind whipped at his jacket and carried his voice behind them.

"Sorry," replied Klausl without looking over.

Amon glanced at her.

"I don't mind. In fact, pick up the pace if you can."

"That isn't what I meant."

"What?"

"Um… I was talking about before…when I hit you."

Her voice grew weaker toward the end and Amon rubbed his slapped cheek.

"That hurt."

Even after hearing his blunt comment, she continued facing forward.

"But that was your fault, Amon."

"Why?"

"You were speaking to me, but you suddenly mentioned another woman. I couldn't help myself."

She tensed her shoulders uncomfortably and Amon frowned.

"*That's* why I was slapped?"

"S-sorry. But… But it's an important issue, so…"

Watching her as she trailed off, Amon frowned and sank down in his seat.

"Well, whatever. At least the arm I healed is working."

"Eh?"

"You don't remember which hand you slapped me with?"

"Oh, um, the arm you healed is doing great. Really. Look."

"Don't swing the reins around!"

The headless Nightmares directly responded to the movement of the reins. They nearly veered over into the opposing lane, but Amon got them back under control. They returned to the proper lane without dropping in speed.

"That was close."

He turned around to make sure they had not left any confusion behind and then handed the reins back to Klausl.

"Oh, thank you very much. Also, um, well…"

"There's more?"

"When you healed me…um, I'm not sure how to put this… Did you see?"

"What?"

"Well, what I mean is… How was I?"

"W-wait just a minute!"

At that moment, the cart hit a stone and bounced up. The wooden boxes in the back clattered together as the cart landed.

Amon had been trying to say something, but he must have bit his tongue because he covered his mouth with a hand.

"~!"

Meanwhile, Klausl continued facing forward and ignored Amon's groan of pain.

"That was the first time I let someone other than my father see my body."

"Y-y'know!"

"Eh?"

When Klausl turned toward Amon, her cheeks were flushed.

"!"

Amon was dumbfounded and Klausl continued to blush.

"Is something the matter?"

"Your face is red."

"Eh? Oh, yes. I don't know why. This never happened before no matter how embarrassed I got, but it suddenly happened just now. …How strange. I wonder why."

A Sein Frau would grow as soon as she felt the need for that ability.

So what did it mean if she blushed?

"…"

When the answer came to Amon, he placed a hand on her head.

"Watch the road. The heat in your face is…from a cold. Yeah, a cold."

"But…"

"Shut up. A cold is the beginning of all illnesses."

After that strange comment, he focused on the road ahead and sighed. He was on his way to a battle, but his body was not at all tense.

As if to scold him for that, a blade-like presence suddenly stabbed into him.

This was murderous intent.

"Mh!?"

The murderous intent belonged to someone standing in the center of Victoria Street. She wore a white dress, her black hair fluttered in the wind, and she stood there as if to stop the cart.

"Miss Moyla!?"

"It doesn't matter! Drive right into her!"

Amon jumped from the front seat to the back of the cart. He snapped his suspenders as he shouted toward the rapidly approaching witch.

"Come on! I'll take you on!"

His roaring voice was filled with strength.

They were less than three minutes to Westminster Cathedral and it was just under ten minutes until midnight when Ralf had said heaven would be brought down.

Part 6

Just as Amon and Klausl encountered Moyla, the Savoy Hotel had become a giant execution site.

Gunman Ralf was the executioner.

He had two targets: the Inspector and Fir.

The Inspector pulled on Fir's hand and jumped to hide behind a marble column.

"Ow ow ow ow ow!"

"Don't shout, Fir!"

A loud gunshot rang out just as the Inspector shouted. The marble column broke down the middle as if its contents had been blown out. Fragments washed over the Inspector as he backed away. It was worth mentioning that he kept Fir safely behind his back.

"There's nowhere to hide. I'm in top form right now."

Ralf's voice was cheerful. He had been standing in the center of the lobby and firing his gun without even turning to face them. He may have thought they were not worth pursuing.

The Inspector actually clicked his tongue which was rare for him.

"This isn't good. I seem to be having a streak of bad luck right now."

"Oh? And when will that streak end?"

"Good question." He placed a hand on his chin at the perfect angle. "When you are gone, I suppose."

A sudden gunshot rang out.

This time, Fir tugged on the Inspector's collar. The two of them collapsed toward the entrance to escape.

They hid behind a sofa, but the back was blown away and white fluff scattered everywhere.

The fluff floated around like powdered snow, but some of it was scorched from the heat of the bullet's passage.

The Inspector crawled along the ground and knocked a table on its side as a barricade.

"This guy can't take a joke. You'll never have a successful career like that."

"Well, I think your career's about at its end too."

"That's dark, Fir. Can't you be more cheerful?"

"I'm trapped in an inescapable barrier with an unreliable boss and a powerful enemy. How am I supposed to be cheerful?"

"What if we add this to the equation?"

The Inspector turned toward Fir and pulled a metal device from his coat pocket.

It was a handgun.

It was a six-shot revolver, but Fir did not recognize the type.

"That does cheer me up. But the Yard doesn't normally carry guns."

"I picked it up at home."

Fir's expression showed she did not believe him, but he held out the gun.

"Take it."

"You're not going to use it?"

"In the end, a dandy gentleman has to use his fists to fight."

"Idiot."

Fir took the gun with a frown and Ralf's gunshot seemed to challenge them.

The last decorative plant was blown away as if it had exploded.

"What are you doing hiding back there? This isn't any fun if you don't try to run."

Fir bared her teeth and prepared to poke her head up, but the Inspector held her down.

"Fir, listen carefully."

"Ow ow ow ow. C'mon, women only want their lover to touch their hair."

"The hair salon worker is your lover? ….No, we need to take this seriously."

"Wh-what is it?"

Hearing her confused voice, he pointed behind her.

"The hallway to the Savoy's first floor is a few meters behind you. Run in there."

"He'll shoot me halfway there!"

"I'll move at the same time. Once you slide into the hallway, close the fire shutter. The one in here's electric, so you just have to hit the button and it will close."

"What about you?"

He smiled at her question.

"I'll find a way to escape even if it means leaving you here."

"U-um, y'know…"

"Shut up. This is your chance. Go!"

He shoved her out toward the hallway door.

…I can't believe this!

She stood without turning around and ran. She ignored the murderous intent on the back of her neck and Tasked herself to run. Her toenails jabbed into the bottom of her shoes as she kicked off the lobby floor.

The gunman's intent to kill struck her back and she almost stopped as it grew thicker and thicker. On the third step, she could feel that thick and heavy intent to kill focusing on the very center of her back. But at the same time…

"What are you doing? I'm the bigger prize."

She heard the Inspector's voice.

The murderous intent vanished from her back. The pressure disappeared.

She ran and ran and ran as fast as she could.

She saw the hallway entrance right in front of her.

…I can make it!

She was certain of it. She Overrode her body forward and leaped. She used her feline nimbleness to leap as far as she could.

She reached out her hand in midair and pressed the button for the emergency alarm.

Three things happened all at about the same time: the bright red sound of the alarm rang out, Fir landed, and the fire shutter started to separate the hallway from the lobby.

She slid across the carpet on her back and twisted around. She pressed against the hallway wall and looked back toward the lobby.

"Inspector!"

The man was persevering past Ralf on the other end of the lobby. His eyes turned toward Fir, but he did nothing and said nothing. Ralf had not moved from his spot between them.

The two men glared at each other as the fire shutter continued down. Feeling like her field of vision was shrinking, Fir shouted again.

"Inspector!!"

She received a gunshot in response.

A bullet moving too fast to see blew away the column the Inspector tried to hide behind and cut off his escape.

Next, Ralf turned toward Fir.

"I guess I'll leave you until later."

His tone of voice showed clear delight and he aimed his rifle back at the Inspector.

At the same time, the lobby was cut off from her view. The fire shutter had fully closed.

"!"

She stood up.

At that moment, she heard multiple sounds that reverberated in her gut from beyond the shutter meant to defend against flames and smoke.

The gunshots were low and deep.

Fir knew what was happening, so she backed away from the shutter as if she refused to believe the scene occurring beyond it.

"That…can't be happening."

She held the revolver tight and backed down the hallway.

She saw the dining hall to the left.

"Does this connect to the kitchen we saw before?"

She stopped moving.

"…"

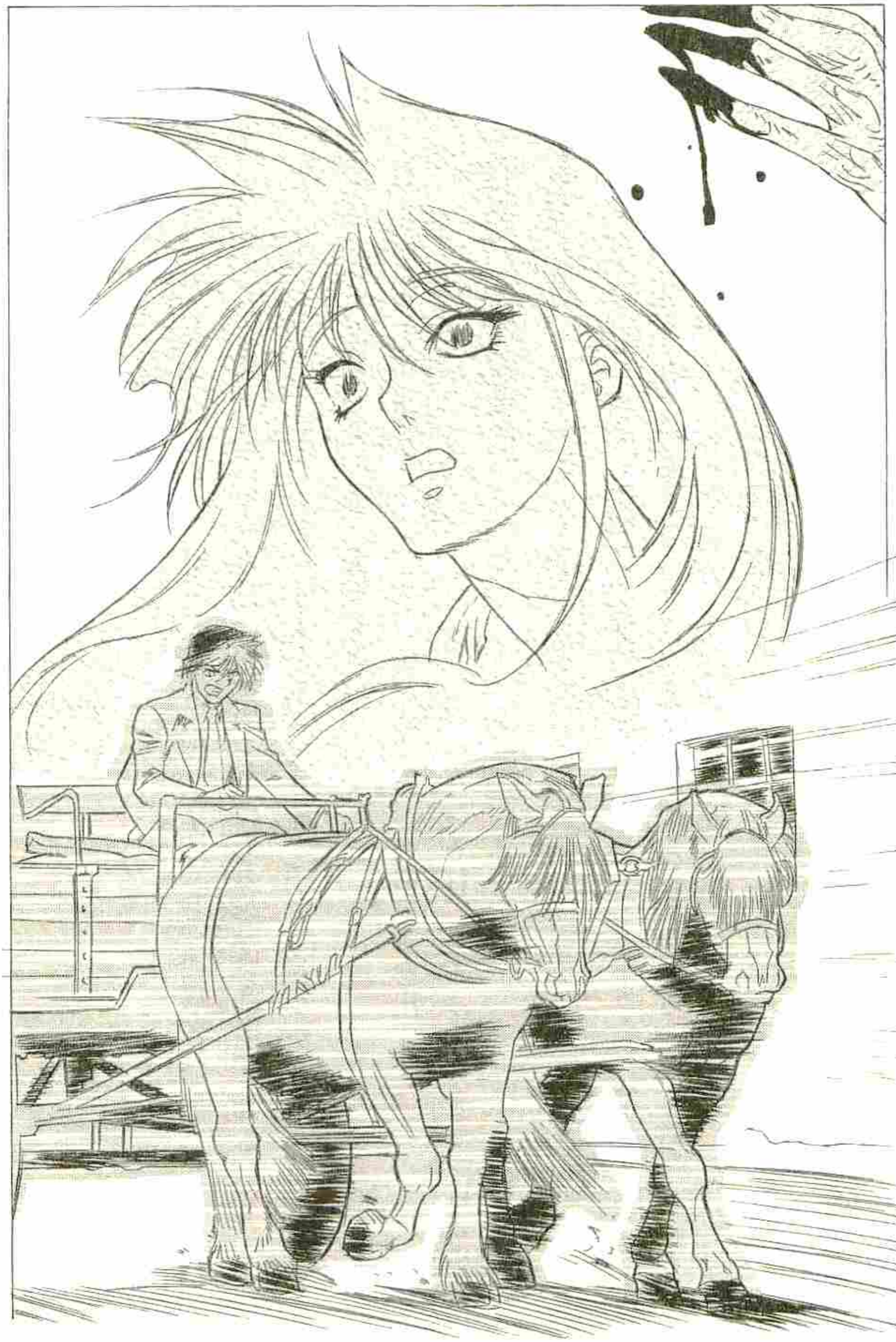
After a short silence, she charged into the dining hall.

She was not trying to flee. She was trying to find any possible way of winning.

Part 7

The witch's jump surpassed the realm of humanity.

Moyla kicked off the road toward Amon who took a defensive stance on the back of the cart. She leaped…no, flew toward him. Her white dress spread out in the night air and picked up the city's lights. It looked like a snowflake.



"Amon!"

The white shadow flew over Klausl's head and even Amon's shoulder. She easily and silently landed behind Amon on the back of the cart.

"!"

Amon turned toward her and saw an open-handed jab coming at him like a spear. It was a quick strike and the fingernails growing from her white hand left a red afterimage behind. Was the scarlet decorating her nails a manicure or was it blood?

The cart maintained its speed and Amon back-stepped out of the way without losing his balance. He then faced his opponent.

There was no strength in Moyla's eyes, but her movements were sharp. This time, she made a sudden karate chop. Not only that, but she made a full swing from directly to his side. It was not a straight-line movement.

…This woman knows how to fight!?

He felt a chill on his spine and his body crouched on its own. He reflexively stuck out a foot to kick Moyla in the gut. This was no time to hold back.

The kick would have broken some ribs with a normal opponent, but she endured it while only taking a few steps back.

"What!?"

He gasped at that and she folded her fingers together with tremendous speed. The movement showed no sign of hesitation or damage.

…Is she not human!?

The very next moment, light flew through the air.

The light grazed his right shoulder and struck a red brick building along Victoria Street. It was a school known as a Bluecoat School. The spear of light blew up the sculpture on top of the building.

Stone fragments scattered everywhere and poured down on Amon and Moyla like colorful rain.

However, they quickly left the fragments and commotion behind.

Moyla charged toward Amon and threw an open-handed jab toward his crouched body.

He Overrode one of the cart's wooden boxes into his hands. It was empty and he used it to block Moyla's strike.

Her red nails easily broke through the wooden box and out the other side.

But that was fine.

As the splinters washed over him, he forcibly twisted the box.

An unpleasant noise came from the box. It was the sound of scraping flesh and of a dry branch breaking.

"Seyah!"

He kicked her knee from the front to knock her down.

With a dull sound, the white dress fell face down and swept Amon aside with her empty hand. Her face remained expressionless and her eyes weak.

Amon kicked that face.

He did not hold back.

He heard a dull sound he would rather not have heard.

Moyla's teeth scattered across the cart and her nicely-shaped nose was turned at an odd angle.

"How about that!?"

As if to deny his triumphant tone, she stood unsteadily back up and prepared her unharmed hand.

"You're persistent."

Just as he clicked his tongue, Klausl shouted back at him.

"Amon! We're about to turn left!"

"All right!"

Moyla stepped forward as if his shout had been her cue and he picked up a new wooden box.

The cart began to curve left. Centrifugal force tugged them to the outside. Amon faced the rear of the cart, so his balance shifted to the left and Moyla's to her right.

Perhaps due to the box hanging from her right arm, Moyla swayed outward.

That motion settled the fight.

"Seyaaahh!"

Amon swung his box from the direction she was falling toward. He swung it free of the centrifugal force and into the side of her head.

The box broke and Moyla's face caved in.

There was a great shattering sound.

The box had been filled with bottles.

The bottles collided with her head, broke, and spilled their contents. Their weight bent her neck at an unnatural angle and her blood mixed with the strong mixed cocktail.

The cart reached the end of the curve and sped up.

Moyla could not keep up with the change in speed and she swayed backwards. With boxes still attached to her right arm and face, she fell off the cart and to the road.

Amon turned his back on her and the wind struck him in the face. He looked straight forward.

He saw Westminster Cathedral up ahead.

That was the final battlefield for them all.

Chapter 7: Blissful Death

Part 1

The Savoy Hotel was far from silent.

The alarm Fir had activated filled it with hysteric noise.

It pierced through and echoed off the entire building, gathered in the lobby, and finally reached Ralf's ears.

"What a racket."

He gave a sigh after finishing off his fleeing prey. He shook his head to loosen up his shoulders and Overlossed the rifle in his left hand. He grabbed a shotgun instead.

Finally, he took a step from the center of the lobby.

He made his way to the hallway leading to the Savoy's first floor. More accurately, he made his way to the fire shutter blocking the way.

He used his real left arm to swap out the shotgun's magazine.

"There's no point in running, you know?"

He cocked it with one arm. After sending the first round to the chamber, he opened the magazine and loaded another round. He swung the gun to close the magazine and aim at the shutter with a single smooth motion.

With a loud gunshot, several small holes appeared in the pure white shutter.

"Hm."

He nodded and took a few steps back. He lightly swung the shotgun forward and back to cock it. The used cartridge was ejected and fell to the floor where it scorched the carpet.

Another gunshot rang out.

Another group of holes appeared like a swarm of ants, but over a wider area this time.

Without a pause, he cocked it again and fired the final shot.

He Overlossed the shotgun at the same time and held a submachine gun in his left hand instead. He fired it.

The bullets had less penetrative power, but when they struck the fire shutter, they connected and widened the previous holes until they became a single large hole.

The alarm grew even louder.

Ralf ignored it, slipped through the hole in the shutter, and looked around.

"Where did she run off to?"

He needlessly spoke his question aloud and pushed his sunglasses up his nose. Beyond the round black lenses, his blue eyes looked to the floor. His gaze was sharp and still.

"I see."

The thick Savoy carpet clearly told him where his target had run.

He turned toward the dining hall.

After looking at the glass door from the side and entering, he found a large open space.

The dining hall was actually a world-famous English restaurant known as Simpson's. A tie was required when dining there and it had the formality and ambiance to match.

Of course, no one was eating there now.

The wooden tables, wooden chairs, lace tablecloths, and everything else were covered with the scorch marks of Ashing.

Ralf had killed and destroyed everything here.

"The roast beef was pretty good, but just that's not enough."

While giving a completely different comment from the day before yesterday, he looked around the half-ruined restaurant. He

searched for his target. He Overrode behind the tables, beyond the decorative plants, on the other side of the curtains, and everywhere else as he searched.

He could not find her.

"?"

He frowned, but then he heard a noise.

It came from the kitchen in the back of the restaurant. It sounded like something small falling over.

It was enough of a sound to warrant walking that way.

He pulled out the submachine gun magazine and threw it aside. He pulled a new one from his pocket and slammed it in. His eyes were trained on the kitchen the entire time.

He started walking as soon as the magazine clicked into place. The bottom of his minister's clothing fluttered behind him.

After a few steps, he reached the counter between restaurant and counter.

The kitchen beyond the counter was large. Just to be safe, he took a step back and walked from left to right along the counter.

Once he reached the open door, he twisted his head to loosen his shoulders again. He continued doing it for a while but finally Overlossed his action and continued on.

"Now, then."

He took a breath and quickly entered the kitchen.

He moved silently, pressed his back against the wall next to the door, and searched for his enemy. He could see past the kitchen counter on the right, but not the one on the left.

He saw no sign of anyone.

But then he heard another noise.

"!"

He looked over and saw an open door in the back of the kitchen that led to the back entrance. The wind or something was moving the door enough to tap against the wall. That was the small sound he had heard before and what had led him to enter the kitchen.

…Did she get away!?

He briefly wondered if he had been led here and subconsciously started walking between the two counters.

But then he saw something odd as the door moved.

It was a cat.

He guessed it was a pet of one of the guests he had killed because he saw a Siamese cat with black paws. It was playing with the door by pushing it into the wall.

He had not seen it before because the kitchen counter had been in the way.

He reflexively aimed his gun at it and smiled bitterly.

"What a cute trap."

Had his target thought this cat would distract him with the noise?

He lightly poked at his head with the grip of the submachine gun in his left hand.

He started to take another step but suddenly stopped.

"…?"

His eyes were focused on the door the cat pushed with its front paws. He stared at the metal door.

The door was polished like a mirror and it reflected the kitchen from an angle he could not see. It showed the area behind the left kitchen counter.

The large door reflected a blue form.

The reflection was far from perfect, but he recognized it. It was the Scotland Yard uniform worn by the girl who had escaped down the hallway. There was no mistaking it.

"I see."

He Closed his feelings so she would not notice. Instead, he made a smile so large even he noticed.

He must have surprised the cat because it stopped pushing on the door and moved away. It looked afraid and it escaped to Ralf's right with its fur standing on end.

He did not pursue the cat.

He held the submachine gun in his left arm and made his way to the left kitchen counter.

He moved in an instant.

He jumped up on the counter, aimed at the corner she was hiding behind, and pulled the trigger.

He fired again and again.

Shell cases flew and smoke scattered from the gun while wood splinters and metal fragments burst from the counter. Even if it was only a submachine gun, it could still pierce a two centimeter steel panel at close range. The bullets half-destroyed the counter and turned what hid behind it into red pieces.

The scattering tempo was eight per second. The music ended after just over two seconds.

Ralf immediately threw away the magazine and loaded the next .

Meanwhile, the blue uniform was thrown from behind the counter and into the wall. He looked to see her Ash…except she did not.

"!?"

The blue uniform came apart and he saw its contents roll out.

It was filled with hunks of flesh.

However, the body wearing the uniform had something it should not have.

A femur grew from the top of the white and red flesh like a head.

"It can't be!" he shouted.

At the same time, he heard a sharp voice from his right.

"Freeze! I'll blow your head off!"

He moved just his eyes to look over.

He found the girl pointing a handgun at him from behind the right kitchen counter. Her naked upper body stuck up above the counter and held the gun.

"Sorry, but everything in the uniform was edible meat."

"Hm. But I didn't see anyone back there before…"

He did not avoid looking at Fir's body.

"Was that cat you? Come to think of it, I feel like I've seen it before."

"That's right. We met in St. James's Park."

"Oh, that's right. That's right."

He nodded and seemed oddly calm.

The girl aiming a gun at him blatantly frowned at his attitude.

"At any rate, put down that dangerous thing you're holding there. Don't try to shoot because I'll be faster. Yours is in your left hand after all."

"I see the Yard makes up for not using guns by knowing how to handle an armed opponent."

He smiled bitterly.

"But it doesn't go beyond that."

"What!?"

She grew more defensive and he laughed.

"Did you not notice I haven't Overridden my right arm this whole time?"

"!"

She stared at him as his body appeared more clearly.

There was nothing inside his right sleeve. The false arm he had shown off on the terrace was gone.

His gaze turned to the kitchen entrance he had used.

The girl looked there too.

"It seems setting up this trick paid off."

He focused on the kitchen entrance.

At some point his metal right arm had appeared on the floor there.

It held a rifle. Its aim was not perfect, but it was pointed at his final target.

"Crap!" shouted the girl.

Ralf's face twisted into a slight smile.

And he Opened a powerful Task.

…Shoot her!

The false arm reacted to his will and moved.

It squeezed the trigger and fired.

The girl's white naked body was blown away. She was knocked into the air and slammed into the wall. She knocked kitchen tools to the floor and collapsed.

"…Ah."

The bullet had not been fatal, but it had torn into her side.

Regardless, it was still a serious wound.

Ralf looked down on the silent girl from atop the counter.

Her blood pooled on the cement kitchen floor. Her white skin and scarlet blood contrasted each other nicely and seemed to give off a scent.

She was no longer moving. The shock may have knocked her out.

"You put up a good fight, just like a final target should."

With that, he jumped down from the counter, started toward his false arm by the entrance, and sighed.

"In the end, there's no one to save you in times like this."

He picked up his false arm and slowly stuck it into his right sleeve. He gently closed his eyes and attached it as if twisting his shoulder.

After a metallic sound, the contents of his right sleeve moved.

Satisfied by the sensation, he aimed the rifle still held by the false right arm. This time, his aim was accurate. He targeted her head.

"Amen."

His eyebrows twisted a bit and he silently tightened his grip on the trigger.

But just before he pulled it, an impossible voice stopped him.

"Don't give in like that, holy man."

The voice came from the restaurant beyond the kitchen entrance .

"!"

He turned around and saw someone who should not have been there.

He saw the target he had only just killed. He saw the man known as the Inspector.

Part 2

Amon and Klausl ran.

They had reached Westminster Cathedral.

They ran across the open area the bazaar had been held in, passed through the main entrance that sat wide open despite the late hour, and ran down the hallway to the sanctuary.

They did not have much time left and it was all over if they did not make it.

Amon cursed his lack of wings.

…Dammit!

If he had them, he could move more quickly and he would have the power to fight as a demon.

He felt that he was still a hindrance to himself.

"Amon, what is it?" asked Klausl.

He turned toward her and found her running alongside him with her usual expression.

She was a bit out of breath and she smiled at him.

"It'll be okay. Let's do our best!"

He smiled bitterly at her words and faced forward. They were approaching the door to the sanctuary.

He had a feeling that he would reach the conclusion of it all beyond that door.

Would it be death?

…Will it really?

It was very unlike him to question death like that.

To find the answer, he kicked open the wooden door in front of him. There was little resistance, so it flew open with a solid sound.

"…!"

A large space welcomed him in.

The atmosphere was very different from during the day. The dark dome contained a deep dark pressure. It was a cloudy night, so no light entered through the skylights.

At the center of the candlelit sanctuary was a large hole that looked like a bottomless pit. Two giant chains rose from its depths.

Beyond the hole was the sanctuary's altar. The altar was dyed slightly red by the candles' flames and a man sat on it.

It was Valeath.

He held a drawn sword that shined in the candlelight.

"So you're here."

When he saw Amon, he slowly stood. He moved silently, but the presence accompanying the motion carried an impact on the level of the earth shaking.

Amon received Valeath's presence head on. He also shouted back to deflect that presence.

"Why do you want to bring down heaven!?"

Valeath looked upwards without answering the question. Amon followed suit and looked to the sanctuary ceiling.

He saw the large hanging bell and the hammer to hit it.

The hammer glowed red in the candlelight and it had a strange machine attached.

It was the size of a human head and it had vacuum tubes, cords, and a strange antenna. Overall, it somewhat resembled a flower. Like vines, the cords extending from it continued straight down with the chains and vanished into the darkness.

Valeath and Amon both lowered their raised heads and their gazes met.

"!"

Amon was directly pushed back by the other man's murderous aura, but someone supported him from behind. It was Klausl.

"It'll be okay."

As she spoke those quiet words, the floor began to shake.

"What!?"

"Amon! The chain!"

He looked in the direction she indicated and saw the thick chain connecting the hole to the ceiling beginning to move down. The series of ellipses large enough for him to pass through clearly picked up speed as it moved further and further down.

"It is almost midnight. It is time for the Babel Cannon to be fired ."

The sounds of the pipe organ and the bell would reverberate through the deep pit. The resultant sound would grow as the voices of London's monsters resonated with it and it would all be fired toward heaven.

Millions of monsters' voices would be concentrated into a single blast to destroy the chapter title pages protecting heaven.

Heaven would then lose its balance and fall down on London.

"Once the bell rings twelve times, London will be destroyed. And in exchange, the knowledge of heaven will escape to the human world."

Amon listened to Valeath and looked up at the hammer on the ceiling. The metal device slowly moved according to the movement of the chains. It gradually pulled back and built up power.

"If the bell rings twelve times, it means London and I have lost. That's a lot of responsibility."

As he spoke, Amon moved his legs to circle around on the right and toward Valeath. He heard Klausl's footsteps following him. They gave him an odd sense of calm.

…It'll be okay, hm?

He Opened that thought so she could read it. He kept his eyes on Valeath and tensed his body. He snapped his suspenders with his fingers and created a rhythm.

But then…

"?"

He detected an odd scent.

It did not belong in this building. The sanctuary only smelled of stone, of the night air, and faintly of machinery, but a scent he knew all too well mixed in.

It was the smell of alcohol.

"It can't be!"

He quickly stopped and turned around. He was a little panicked because this smell of alcohol was mixed with the fragrance of blood.

His gaze moved past Klausl and to the sanctuary entrance.

Something strange appeared there.

It looked like a person, but not quite. Its right arm ended partway down and looked like something had bitten it off. Its head lay on its side.

It was Moyla.

Her face was completely unrecognizable. Her head was twisted perpendicular to the floor, the front looked like a peeled tomato, and it looked like it could fall off at any moment with how much it shook with her movement.

Either from the wine spilled from the bottles or some other liquid, her dress was stained pure red.

"She can still move!?"

Amon shouted out with pure revulsion in his voice and the bell rang.

The great noise was accompanied by deep music bursting from underground.

The noise was intense.

The wave of sound could easily be called a physical impact.

As if that had been her cue, Moyla ran straight forward.

She made no wasted movement. Most of her body had been destroyed, but her feet kicked solidly off the floor and brought her to Amon and Klausl.

She was fast.

Amon, the primary cause of her injuries, grimaced.

"Geh. This is pretty bad."

The bell rang again.

A moment later, Moyla jumped toward him. Heavy with a variety of liquids, her dress waved behind her.

She flew quickly through the air.

Amon tugged on Klausl's hand and escaped along the hole's railing. A red flower landed on the spot he had just vacated and a chop of the hand smashed the railing in a spectacular fashion.

The sound was great enough to be heard over the bell.

The sound must have scared Klausl because she frantically ran alongside Amon.

"That was intense."

"Don't point out the obvious."

The two of them moved back and turned the corner. The straightaway felt long, but they were just one corner away from where Valeath was.

The bell rang for a third time.

Klausl looked up at Amon with her brow furrowed worriedly.

He tried to decide what expression to give her, but finally Opened a thought.

…We've got to do something, don't we?

Now he was pointing out the obvious, but she nodded and the two continued to flee.

Moyla pursued with long strides.

Pulled by Amon's hand, Klausl reached into her apron skirt as if searching for something.

"Hey! What are you doing!?"

Just as he shouted at her, the bell rang for the fourth time. Moyla charged headfirst toward them as if driven on by the sound.

"!"

Amon reached for Klausl and tried to pull her toward him, but she looked over her shoulder at him. She gave a closed-eyed smile as if telling him not to worry.

"Hey!" he shouted in surprise.

In that instant, Moyla's shoulder collided with Klausl.

The slender back in front of Amon's eyes bent and the blonde hair flew through the air. A complex metallic sound passed from inside her body and out her back.

It was a sound of destruction.

What had caused it?

That was simple.

He could tell at a glance. Moyla's left hand had pierced through Klausl's back. That was all.

The red-nailed fingers were surrounded by wires and small gears. Those were the parts that made up Klausl.

"…!"

Amon opened his mouth wide and tried to shout something, but he only managed to inhale and no voice came out.

The bell rang for the fifth time.

Klausl moved a little in front of Amon. Her slender arms wrapped around Moyla's body.

He saw a match in her hand. It was a waterproof match used for cooking.

"You mustn't let yourself smell of alcohol."

Her trembling voice spoke kindly to Moyla and lightly struck the match. Even amid the din of the bell and pipe organ, the quiet scraping sounded clearly in Amon's ears.

The sound briefly hung in the air, a flame lit, and a soft aroma filled the area. It was a sweet aroma often smelled when cooking. It was the aroma of meat cooked in wine.

Moyla's entire body was immediately enveloped in flames.

"…!"

The back of the burning red dress jumped up.

The flames rose along her entire body, her head, and her mangled face.

She pushed at Klausl's arms, let out a wordless cry as if afraid of the flames, and swung her body around.

Klausl was removed from her, starting with the left arm.

The bell rang for the sixth time.

Klausl leaned back against the railing and just barely managed to remain standing.

Moyla seemed to perform a crazed dance next to her.

The dead could not feel pain, but the nerves controlling her muscles still functioned. Burning her body caused those nerves to burst and she lost control of her body.

Her sickly white skin turned to keloids which then burned away along with her other wounds.

Her right arm ended at the elbow and her left arm was wrapped in flames, but they both moved as if swimming to gather in air. Her lungs must have been burning. The arms pounded on and broke the railing.

Now nothing supported her.

But as she became a mass of flames, she walked aimlessly forward and seemed to beg for air.

The bell rang for the seventh time.

Her foot stepped out past the edge of the hole.

As if called by the sound of the bell, she collapsed forward. Her arms and legs seemed to be swimming as she fell into the abyss. She fell into the hole that produced the pipe organ music.

As a flower illuminating the darkness, she slipped down.

For a while, an unpleasant sound of something being chewed to pieces came from far below.

That may have been why the eighth ring of the bell seemed somewhat hesitant and awkward.

Klausl stared down there. She supported herself on the railing while looking down to the bottom of the hole.

Amon held her in his arms and supported her.

He held her tight as she could not stand due to the hole in her gut.

And he cried her name.

“Klausl!”

She looked up at him with her eyes still closed.

As a doll she may not have felt pain because her expression was the same as always. However, her clothing was scorched by flames and covered in Moyla’s drying blood.

Worst of all was the gaping hole from her stomach to back. Wires and chains dangled down from it, something like mercury dripped down like raindrops, and small nuts sprinkled out.

The shaft that acted as her backbone seemed to have broken, so everything below her waist was unsteady and swayed just like a doll.

She felt sadly fragile in his arms.

He tried to say something, but stopped when her hand touched his cheek.

“You finally called my name.”

His lips trembled.

"I…I…"

"Please don't apologize," she said.

He swallowed the words.

After a short delay, the bell rang for the ninth time.

"I decided on my own to do this for you. It would be too tragic if you apologized."

She smiled just as all strength left her lower body. The full weight of the doll filled his arms.

The end was near, but she did not stop speaking.

"I'm worried about you. You always blame yourself for everything."

"Don't talk!"

"You try to act cold and push others away, but you still get so desperate when something happens to me."

Her hands grabbed his right arm.

"?"

He was confused, but he did not fight it. He reached his right hand in the direction she led it.

His hand touched the hole in her stomach. He felt the soft and warm skin inside her torn clothing and then his hand began to enter her body.

He wrapped his left arm around her back and she wrapped her arms around his neck and held on tight as if embracing him.

"…"

The next thing he knew, his right hand had entered her body through the hole in her stomach.

His hand slowly buried itself in that manmade body.

First just the fingers and then up to the wrist.

She gasped as he moved his fingers and she pressed her body into his arm.

"Nn."

A metal component touched his fingers. It was not cold. It was a hard object with an almost damp warmth to it. He guessed it was a rim.

But that was not what he was looking for.

He reached further inside her.

A quick tremor ran through her body.

"Ah."

"Does it hurt?"

"Deep in my stomach…I felt… No, don't worry about it. Keep going."

He silently nodded.

Sometimes he came across something wet and sometimes he came across something sharp and he searched through her body. He lifted his hand inside her stomach, scraped along the inside of her ribs, and moved toward the chest.

By that time, his arm was in up to the elbow.

"Hh."

Each time he touched a component, she would let out a small breath, but it only lasted a moment.

Just as the bell rang for the tenth time, strength filled her hands.

"Nn."

Her face flushed all the way to the ears and she clawed at his jacket as she endured something and spoke.

"That's…it. You're…touching it."

His hand grabbed the object within the left side of her chest.

"I'll be taking this."

She slowly nodded.

With a sound much like spilling coins, he pulled out his right hand.

"Ahhh!"

She pulled back from him as if from recoil and grabbed the railing behind her again. She then raised her head and forced a smile.

The smile on her slightly flushed face looked somehow satisfied .

He looked at her face and then down at what he had pulled from her body.

He held the red gear said to be her heart.

"…"

She may not have been able to speak any longer because she faced him and asked an Opened question.

…How strange. Why am I smiling?

He was taken aback by her voice and slight smile.

This was the same situation as in his nightmares. It was the same smile he had seen on his mother and Eilen.

…How can you smile? What are you trying to say?

Had she seen his question? She gave him the biggest smile he had ever seen and replied with her own words.

…See you…again someday.

She threw herself backwards and fell down as if pursuing Moyla.

Amon stretched out his hand, but he could not reach her.

"Klausl!"

His yell did not reach her either. All that remained was the gear in his right hand and…

"Revenge."

Valeath's voice reached him from directly behind.

"!"

Amon began to turn toward the man who had approached at some point.

Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw a silver arc filled with intent to kill.

Part 3

Ralf stopped trying to kill the girl and entered the restaurant.

"You weren't dead? But I shot four times in the limbs and cleanly blew off your head."

"The world is a tricky place."

The Inspector was elegantly drinking wine at a table and chair that had escaped destruction. He drank the wine from a water glass he must have found on the floor.

"Yes, Savoy's Simpson's really is the best. This is French, isn't it ?"

The bottle had lost its top half, but he picked it up and tried to read the label as he took another sip from the glass.

Ralf silently approached and aimed his gun at the man from a few steps away.

"I will make sure to kill you this time. …I won't spare you even if you beg."

"No, probably not. You really seem to hate monsters."

Ralf smiled.

"What's wrong with hunting monsters? It's a natural punishment. Anything dangerous to mankind must be destroyed."

"Some probably do say that."

The Inspector nodded, placed the glass on the table, elegantly crossed his legs, and looked over at Ralf.

"But have you ever felt you were being hunted?"

Ralf's answer was incredibly easy to understand.

He fired.

The shock of the blast shook the glass and smoke rose from the gun.

However, one thing did not change.

The Inspector remained sitting in the chair. He had not moved in the slightest.

"!"

Ralf quickly loaded the next round and the Inspector gave a quiet announcement.

"You have devoted yourself too much to hatred, sorrowful human. Will you repent?"

Those words stopped Ralf just before he fired again. This gunman had never hesitated in his hunt, so it meant a lot for him to pause.

But he did continue aiming at the Inspector.

"You're asking *me* to repent?"

"Yes."

Hearing the Inspector's low and powerful affirmation, Ralf asked something else.

"And who is going forgive me if I do that?"

The answer was brief.

"God."

Another gunshot rang out.

But still nothing changed.

The Inspector remained in the chair. There was no sign of the bullet having hit his body or clothes.

Ralf knew of a being that could do that. Any holy man would know of that being that was referred to with a simple name.

…I see!

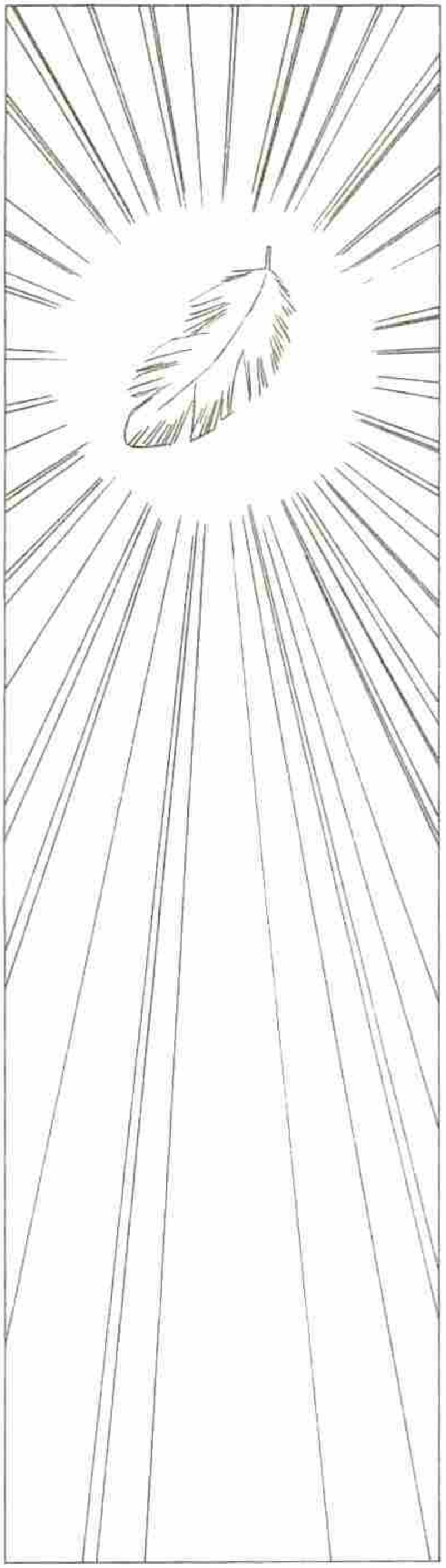
He rejected the word that nearly appeared in his heart. He fully rejected it. Allowing it would make everything he had done meaningless.

He fully Closed his thoughts and held a weapon in each hand. He made the rifle in his right hand vanish and held the submachine gun. He held the shotgun in his left hand.

He then looked to the Inspector and spoke with a slight smile.

"I won't rely on god."

"Why not?"



"I will determine my own destiny. Even if it ends in failure."

He turned the two firearms toward the Inspector.

"I couldn't save the villagers in the past, but they didn't just let themselves die. They picked up weapons and fought."

He took a breath.

"I want you to know that so something like that will never happen again!"

Hearing those words, the Inspector stood. He took a step and removed his coat as if swinging it around.

This revealed the back of his suit which slowly swelled out. It continued to swell like something was growing underneath and then it burst.

Ralf looked to the man's back and saw large white wings that far outshined those of an angel.

"I knew it!"

Ralf cried out and pulled both triggers.

Part 4

Amon was slammed against the wall. He knew exactly why: he had been hit by that kick again.

He coughed up some blood and shook his foggy head. He cleared his mind and the sound of the bell reached his ears.

This was the eleventh ring of the bell. Once it ended, the chain lowered, and the hammer struck the bell again, the ceremony would be complete.

That ceremony would gather all of the voices in London.

He felt something throbbing in his throat.

It was his own voice.

His voice could hardly wait for the twelfth ring and wanted to burst out of him now.

Just as Ralf had said, the demon Horn used in the Babel Cannon was resonating with his own Horn.

…This isn't good. For once, I'm actually acting like a demon.

An instant later, a sharp kick from Valeath stabbed into his side. His body floated up into the air a bit, but he withstood it. He did not fall.

But…

"How disappointing."

The Hound looked at and gave his judgment of the man who had been known as the strongest in his Urban Hero days.

"You can never win if you stay the same as me."

"Shut up."

Amon pressed his heels against the ground in a defensive stance.

Valeath attacked him without delay. The weighty attack sliced through the air and flowed into his next movement. His movements were quick and filled with intent to kill.

That deadly intention was fully Opened and they were the words held by Valeath.

Amon blocked the kick and Valeath's intent to kill directly shouted at him.

…Why can't you dodge this!?

He ducked to avoid a sword strike.

…Why won't you start attacking!?

The attacks overlapped and his words grew more intense. Amon could not catch his breath, so he replied with his own Open Words.

…What's wrong!? You have no time!

…Shut up, you deadly bastard!

Amon kicked. Valeath raised his leg to block it and shifted into a kick of his own.

…Is that all you have!? You can't do any more than that!?

Amon did not answer. This meant he could not attack.

But Valeath did. He sent out attack after attack without using his sword. The barrage of blows and kicks carried murderous intent and words into Amon's body.

…Why!? Why can't you do any more than this!?

…Can you do nothing more than me!?

…Can you only be the same as me!? Can't you do anything else!?

A sharp attack came. It was a right kick.

It connected.

Amon had blocked, but he was knocked through the air and he read Valeath's words.

These words had more power than any of the others.

…Was I doomed to become what I am no matter how hard I struggled!?

That may have been what Valeath truly thought.

Amon regained his footing on the edge of the hole Moyla had fallen into. He somehow managed to remake his fighting stance.

Valeath also took a fighting stance from a few steps away. But he now raised his sword instead of his fists or legs.

"It is time to end this."

Amon heard the chain begin to move behind him. It raced downwards while it gradually picked up speed.

…I can't believe this.

He muttered under his breath in self-deprecation.

"I need to do something."

He was shocked by his own words.

His mind had grown somewhat unclear, so he Overrode it and his body. That brought the pain back to his body and woke him up .

He spoke the same words again, but this time as a question.

"I need to…do something?"

That meant he wanted to win.

That meant he would break out of this situation.

It meant he did not wish for death.

…Why do I want this?

He suddenly noticed the gear he still held in his right hand.

He recalled the words of the girl who had left it with him.

"See you again someday."

What had she meant?

"…"

He squeezed the gear and closed his eyes.

He thought some words as if speaking to himself.

…Don't try to show off.

He thought on those words and let out a forceful sigh. He glanced at the large hole behind him.

Why had Klausl thrown herself into that hole?

He felt like he knew the answer.

He tightly squeezed her gear and Opened a thought.

…It'll be okay.

In the corner of his vision, the chain was approaching its limit.

Valeath was also approaching.

"This ends here!"

A powerful strike came to slice Amon's torso in two. He had no way of avoiding it.

But he avoided it regardless. He leaped back into the darkness at the bottom of the hole.

"Are you following after your woman!?" shouted Valeath.

Part 5

Amon twisted in midair, took an upside-down position, and spread his arms.

He resembled an upside-down cross as he fell into the darkness.

Next to him, the chain was moving downwards to gather strength. The hammer on the ceiling had to have started moving too.

But he did not care.

He had a single reason for falling: he wanted to confirm his thought.

He tore through the darkness.

Far below, he saw a faint light. A steam-powered automatic pipe organ was lit by a small torch. And the giant steam-powered machine that moved it emitted a bit of light too.

There were two giant gears directly below Amon. They were larger than water wheels and the two chains were wrapped around them.

The chains moved sharply and the two gears suddenly moved. They were quickly wrapping around to provide the last bit of power for the hammer before they released the chains.

The giant gears rotated as their teeth engaged with each other.

"!"

Amon looked to the right gear. Exactly what he was looking for lay on top of it and moved along with the gear's movement.

He called out its name.

"Klausl!"

Her metal body was caught in the gap between the two gears and was crushed.

Part 6

Valeath was the first to notice the change.

"Impossible!"

The chains had stopped moving.

Even the hammer stopped just before it moved to hit the bell.

The battle was not over yet.

Part 7

Amon was certain of everything. Klausl had thrown herself into the pit because she had noticed the strange ring of the bell after Moyla fell.

If a human body could do that, what would her metal body do?

She would not die. She would continue to live as long as her heart remained. She had wanted him to handle what came after that.

The gears slowly turned while pressing her body.

He had to win before they fully turned.

He had to win.

Why?

Because he held a certain gear in his right hand.

He held his own body in his arms as he fell. If he continued to fall, he would die.

What did he have to do to avoid that and to win?

There was only one answer.

He gathered strength in the arms holding himself and tensed the flesh of his back. He let out a yell as if releasing everything he had been holding inside and enduring.

"Ohhhhhhhhhhh!"

He remade his body. Just like a beastman, he strongly Tasked himself. He Tasked and Tasked and Tasked.

He Overrode his own form.

"!"

Something ran through his body and mind and released everything that had been locked up.

The transformation appeared instantly like a burning flame.

Part 8

Valeath saw Amon.

He saw the full demon flap its wings in the deep hole and burst out into the candlelight like solidified darkness.

"A demon god!?"

The demon stood tiptoed on the railing and six giant owl wings grew from his back.

These were not the two thin bat wings of a lesser demon. These were wings of a pure demon or a fallen angel and they were filled with a complex pattern.

"…"

The wings slowly wrapped around Amon's body like separate living beings and then forcefully opened.

At the same time, Amon flew toward Valeath. His new wings scattered feathers as he flew forward.

"So you're coming!?"

Valeath raised his sword and leaped forward to meet Amon.

Valeath was the first to move in midair.

"Sheyaaah!"

He released his breath just as the silver line raced forward and cut through one of Amon's wings at the base.

But that was all.

Amon swung a fist down after Valeath's blade and smashed it from above.

With the sound of shattering glass, the white blade turned to snow.

They both landed.

Valeath had already cast aside the hilt. He approached in a lowered stance and reached Amon in only three steps. His right hand was pulled back for an open-hand jab.

"Seyaaaah!"

He cried out as he struck and Amon received the blow while turning around. His eyes were still closed and he received it on the left side of his chest.

The sound of impact was dull.

It was the sound of something breaking and it sounded empty, fragile, and even soft.

"Kh."

The man known as the strongest Hound gave a gasp of surprise.

His eyes were trained on Amon's chest where his hand was buried to the wrist. He stared at it for a while before gasping again.

With a damp sound, he pulled his right hand from the left side of Amon's chest.

His hand was wet with blood.

But it was not Amon's blood. His hand had been crushed beyond recognition.

He had poured everything into that strike, but it had been blocked by something. His hand had been smashed by its own destructive force.

"What was that?"

Amon answered that question in a different way. He stuck his hand into the breast pocket of his jacket where Valeath's hand had stopped and he pulled out a piece of paper.

It was the demon contract Jonathan had left.

The contract now contained Valeath's handprint. It had a bloody print of his mangled hand.

"!"

Valeath drew back and Amon pursued him.

Amon opened his eyes and looked at Valeath. His golden eyes stopped Valeath.

Amon then spoke.

"The contract is complete!"

With a sharp cry, he released his full power.

Part 9

The light that exploded inside Westminster Cathedral's sanctuary was pitch black.

It rose with the force of a wild beast and surged toward heaven.

It looked like a reverse waterfall. It was fierce, large, and unstoppable. The cathedral ceiling could not hope to contain it.

The light's destructive power tore the chains to pieces, smashed the bell, and blew away the brick dome.

The sounds of destruction continued. The broken bricks, metal, bell, and hammer all fell into the abyss never to return. The light swallowed it all and sought even greater heights.

The dark light instantly shot into the sky and broke through the clouds.

It moved fast and rose high.

As soon as it struck the clouds, the light roared. It was the frightening sound of striking a cliff face barehanded. Pushed on by that Task, the clouds covering London's sky cleared away.

The moon floated in the darkness that seemed to ripple out through the sky.

It was not a full moon and it had shrunk down like a living thing, but it shined with a pale light. It was a cold but refreshing light.

The pitch black light must have been satisfied with that because it mixed with the moonlight, spiraled around, looked like it would shoot in all four directions like a group of dragons, and suddenly vanished.

It looked like a celebration of something.

And with that light, a certain incident came to its end.

Part 10

In a stupor, Fir heard someone calling her name. It was a nostalgic feeling. She had been woken like his as a kid living on the streets of the prostitution district.

…Fine, fine. I'll get up.

She Opened her response in a good mood. She slowly opened her eyes, but found a familiar face instead of those old streets.

"Oh, it's you, Inspector."

"Have you finally woken?"

Seeing his exasperated behavior, she fully woke.

He propped her up in his arm while she half lay on the floor. What she wore were not her clothes.

She smelled the Inspector's cologne on the item wrapped around her. It seemed to be his coat, but why was she naked underneath?

She dug through her memories. A lot was missing because she was a Werecat, but she managed to remember it all.

"Inspector, weren't you dead?"

With that horribly casual comment, she checked her surroundings.

She was in the kitchen. It was the scene of a massacre and the scorch marks of Ashing were just as she remembered.

…But this is odd.

"Isn't something about this weird?"

"You're the weirdest one," said the Inspector with a frown. " Don't be killing me off in your mind."

"B-but…"

"Quiet. The case is over and you helped quite a bit."

There was nothing she could do when he said that.

She tilted her head and looked up at his face.

For some reason, he was staring at the restaurant past the kitchen.

"What is it, Inspector? You're looking sad for once."

"Well…"

He trailed off before opening his mouth again. He must have decided there was no point in hiding anything from Fir, so he asked her a question.

"Hey, am I a hypocrite?"

Hearing that, she blinked her large eyes in surprise.

"Do you have a fever?"

"Y-you know…"

He blatantly frowned and Fir must have found the expression amusing because she smiled bitterly.

"Just kidding. I'm just kidding. I couldn't help myself when you said something so weird."

"Is it that weird?"

"It is, it is. Besides, anyone who asks that about themselves isn't a hypocrite. They're what you call…um…"

She paused to choose the right word.

"A coward, I guess."

"Maybe so."

He laughed quietly.

As he held her up, Fir felt over her body below the coat.

When he realized what she was doing, he spoke up.

"I didn't find any injuries on you."

He sounded like he was hiding something and Fir glared at him .

"You saw me naked, didn't you?"

"Eh? Oh, well, um… Is that anything to say to the person who saved your- ow, ow, ow, ow!"

He smiled bitterly as she tugged on him, but he was back to his normal self.

Fir breathed a sigh of relief at that and placed a hand on the cement floor to get up.

"Huh?"

Her hand touched something.

"?"

She picked it up and found it was a single feather.

She assumed it was a chicken feather since this was a kitchen, but it was not. It was longer, it was sharper, and it glowed.

"Inspector… What is this?"

He gave a simple answer to her simple question.

"Divine punishment."

Part 11

The night sky visible through the broken dome was so clear it seemed to suck one in.

The moon in the center of the dome was a half-moon.

Its moonlight directly and softly illuminated the people inside the sanctuary.

That pale moonlight lit two people. One was Amon who stood with his wings and the other was Valeath who sat on the floor.

"So man truly cannot defeat the monsters…"

Valeath looked up at Amon with a trail of blood dripping from his mouth.

The blood from his mouth joined with the blood spilling from the hole in his stomach and spread across the sanctuary floor.

Based on the amount of blood, it would be stopping soon.

His end was near.

"You're strong."

All harshness had left Valeath's face and he gave a small smile.

"Sorry, but can I ask one thing?"

Amon frowned at the unexpected question, so he asked a question of his own.

"Are you going to sell your soul to me?"

"My soul is already filled with darkness. I already know I can't escape hell."

He spat out those words in a definite tone and looked Amon in the eye.

"I want you to call in the soul of a girl."

He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and used the blood on the floor to write out a contract.

"She is the precious girl who trusted me to the very end."

Valeath signed the contract, drew a circular emblem, and wrote out the girl's name.

That was enough for a contract.

Amon took the cloth contract from him and read through it.

He had nothing to say.

The moonlight simply poured kindly down on them.

The feathers that had scattered from Amon's wings shined in the moonlight as they fluttered through the air.

It was a truly, truly quiet night.

Final Chapter: Another Meeting of Love

Ten days had passed.

Amon wore a black jacket, black pants, and a black hat he did not usually wear as he walked through Scotland Yard's main entrance. At a glance, he looked no different than normal because he had Overlossed his wings so they would not get in the way.

However, something was different. Unlike before, his overall atmosphere was not so holed up inside.

"…"

He walked straight forward without looking around. The stairs down to the underground storerooms were located at the end of the hall straight ahead from the entrance.

His pace was quick.

The people inside called out to him when they saw him, but he ignored all of them.

He walked directly down the stairs and into Flandre's room.

"…!"

Two people turned toward him.

One of them was Flandre and the other was smiling.

"Oh, we have a guest."

It was Klausl.

Amon was left speechless.

After all, the Klausl he saw was the one he knew.

She asked him a question with her eyes closed.

"Would you like some tea? Or would you prefer coffee?"

Once she mentioned it, he noticed the scent of tea. They must have been on a break.

"…Ah."

As Amon stared blankly, Flandre elbowed him in the side and spoke to Klausl.

"Could you get him some tea?"

"Of course."

Klausl turned around and walked to the simple kitchen in the back of the room.

Flandre watched her leave, sighed, and sat in a nearby chair. Finally, he slowly looked up at Amon.

"I fixed her. It used up all of my spare parts, though."

"Yeah, I can see that."

Amon's voice was weak and he forced a small smile. Even he could tell that it was an oddly stiff and pathetic smile.

He lowered his hat to hide his expression.

"Does she not remember me?"

"Her personality and her growth were engraved in that gear… but her memories were kept in her head. …Her head and everything else were completely crushed. I checked after the fact."

"Then that's that, I suppose," he said as if consoling Flandre.

He lowered his hat further to hide more of his face and said something else.

"It must be tough for you, old man."

Flandre nodded.

"I was thinking about letting her out into the city instead of keeping her in the Yard. Should I give her to you?"

The mouth peeking out from below Amon's hat was smiling.

"Don't try to comfort me. Besides, she's not a thing you can just give away."

Flandre finally smiled a bit at that.

"Father, what has you so happy?"

Klausl approached with a tray carrying a teapot and cups and she sounded happy too.

Flandre turned toward her.

“Well, this young one praised you saying you’re just like a human.”

“Oh, how wonderful.”

Her cheeks grew red and she smiled. She then turned her back to hide her embarrassment.

She quickly placed the tray on a nearby table.

“Are you from Scotland Yard?”

“No, I’m not.”

“He’s a friend of mine,” added Flandre.

“Is that so? Then I look forward to your future visits.”

“Sure.”

She turned toward him with the usual expression Amon knew, but her ears were still red.

“Okay, the tea is ready. …Um, what is your name?”

“Amon.”

There was a hint of testing in that name, but Klausl's expression remained unchanged.

She pointed at the teacup behind her.

"Then this is your cup, Mr. Amon."

With that said, she stepped away.

He nodded silently and slowly moved over with his hat still pulled low. He walked right in front of her.

The two of them grew closer and were finally within arm's reach.

Suddenly, Klausl turned toward him.

"Is something the matter?"

"Eh?"

"You look troubled by something."

He sighed at that and there was some self-deprecation mixed in.

"I suppose I am. I've got a lot on my mind."

"It must be tough."

"Yeah, a bit."

He sighed again.

"I'm thinking about saying some suitable words to a certain girl , but I end up trying to say something she wouldn't know about."

She smiled at what he said.

And she spoke her own words without knowing what he was talking about.

"At times like that, I think you should say whatever would make her happiest."

"You're probably right."

He smiled bitterly and reached for the teacup on the table.

He forced his gaze down to keep himself from looking at Klausl .

Due to that, his hat gave in to its deep angle and spilled from his head.

"Ah."

Before he could reach down, Klausl picked it up.

"Here you go, Mr. Amon."

He took the hat and said a single word.

"Thanks."

Klausl gave a light bow.

"You're welcome."

She raised her head and her soft-looking blonde hair swayed.

In that instant, Amon looked at her face and was left speechless.

"…!"

Flandre stood up so fast he knocked over his chair.

"Eh?"

Klausl only noticed once she saw how the two men were acting.

She frantically brought her white hand to her cheek.

Her slender fingertips grew damp.

"Huh? My cheek is…wet?"

She was crying.

"Huh?"

She brought her other hand to her other cheek and more tears flowed from between her closed eyelids and wet her hands.

"Are these…tears?"

"Y-yeah, they are," said Flandre.

"Huh? Isn't this strange? I don't know why, but this naturally happened when I heard what Mr. Amon said. …How odd. I have this weird feeling that I can't seem to remember or forget."

"It isn't strange at all."

Amon sounded troubled and like he was trying to convince himself.

"And isn't this enough?"

She had no idea what he meant, but she still shook her head.

"I don't know why I'm crying, but I do know one thing for sure."

She spoke while shedding more tears.

"I want to see your face."

Amon gasped with an indescribable expression on his face.

A moment later, his hand reflexively yet hesitantly touched her cheek.

"Ah."

She let out a quiet voice as he wiped away her tears.

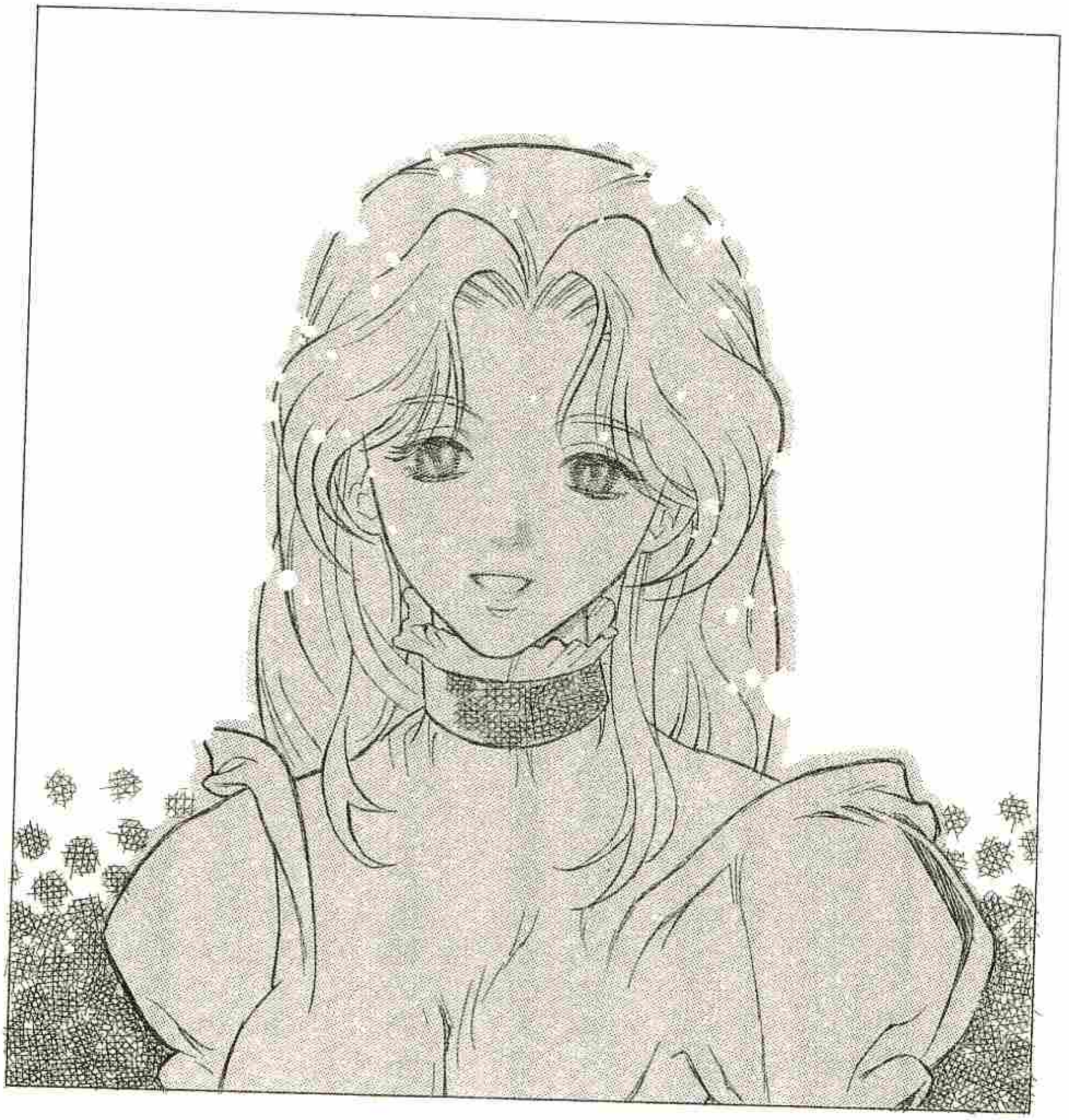
Her closed eyelids shook a bit and then moved. It was a frustratingly slow movement that seemed almost afraid of something and like she did not know how much strength to use.

"It'll be okay."

He spoke the words she had once said to him.

"It'll be okay. You can see. After all, I can already see your eyes."

"Yes."



She nodded and opened her eyes.

They were Overridden.

Amon looked her right in the eye.

And her eyes looked back at his.

No one said a word.

Klausl simply narrowed her eyes and smiled.

Her blue eyes were wet with tears as they looked at Amon.

The eyes wavered from their first contact with light, they were an incredibly deep blue, and Amon was reflected in the few remaining tears.

The blue of her eyes somehow resembled the color of the sky everyone could see overhead.

Closing Words

If you are looking for a drink in Soho, I recommend the shot bar named the Blue Sky.

For some reason, the people of Scotland Yard frequent the bar, so it becomes a confused mix of uniforms and normal clothing during the evening. London's famous Inspector and Hard Wolf priest can be seen there, so it is worth a visit at least once on the weekend.

The bar is run by two people. Look over the counter, and you will see a stylish young demon and a beautiful girl serving the customers.

Of course, there are no normal people in London, so that girl must be some kind of non-human being as well. That is most evident when you see the color of her eyes. Their beauty is probably where the place got its name and there is no way they could belong to a human.

If you say that, the girl will stare up at the young demon next to her and he will give a meaningful smile when he notices.

Of course, this is all the kind of story that you can only find in Aerial City – London.

(From "Records of Modern England – Continued")

Afterword

Now, what am I supposed to say here?

I'm not sure if I can talk about personal things like this here, but just the other day (specifically January 4 of this year), I appeared on a radio show. (Calm down, Kawakami.)

It was a late night Sunday culture show. The show was sponsored by Media Works and called Dengeki Awards, but it was really a lot of fun.

I hung out at a friend's house and listened to the broadcast there, but on the way back, another friend called me even though it was 3:30 in the morning.

"Oh, Kawakami? I heard you on the radio, you idiot."

"You heard that? What's this? Are you out drinking?"

"I'm at work. Now, while I was listening, I started wondering if anything bad had happened to you recently."

"What? Why would you think that?"

"Well, your mood on the radio was something else. You were really intense."

"Aren't I always like that?"

"Yeah, but that's not what society thinks an author is supposed to be like. I thought you were gonna ruin their show with all your jokes and casual comments."

"Are you saying how I normally act is enough to ruin a radio show?"

"Dwa ha ha. Well, I had a good laugh about it. Now, a drink to Media Works for allowing that to air."

"So you are drinking!"

As you can see, it was all sorts of trouble. That's when I realized how much trouble being an author is. (Or is this problem unique to me?)

But when reading the fan letters from Panzerpolis 1935, there really were a few that said they bought it after hearing me on the radio show, so maybe acting like that was for the best.

Anyway, my background music while writing was EPO's Hyakunen no Kodoku (it's a perfect theme for the final chapter) and I was listening to it again while re-reading the book.

"Everyone has a part of them that's like Amon, don't they?"

It got me thinking about that.

Now then, now then. I'm thinking about making Hong Kong the next stage.

February 1997. A “Hey, I think it’s snowing outside” morning.

-Kawakami Minoru

Notes

1. ↑ Kawakami uses the English word aerial because the Japanese word for fictional literally means aerial.